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Full Name of Author — Nom complet de l'auteur

JUDITH PRESCOTT FLYNN

Date of Birth — Date de naissance JAN 12, 1935	Country of Birth — Lieu de naissance CANADA.

Permanent Address — Résidence fixe

292 SCOTIA STREET,
WINNIPEG, MANITOBA.
R2V 1W2.

Title of Thesis — Titre de la thèse

CHILDREN AND DEVILS: A STUDY OF INNOCENCE AND THE DEMONIC IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLES DICKENS.

University — Université

UNIV. OF ALBERTA.

Degree for which thesis was presented — Grade pour lequel cette thèse fut présentée

Ph. D.

Year this degree conferred — Année d'obtention de ce grade 1979.	Name of Supervisor — Nom du directeur de thèse DR. R. D. McMASTER.

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CHILDREN AND DEVILS: A STUDY OF INNOCENCE AND THE DEMONIC IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLES DICKENS

by

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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
FALL, 1979

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Children and Devils: A Study of Innocence and the Demonic in the Novels of Charles Dickens" submitted by Judith Prescott Flynn in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

R. D. McMaster
Supervisor

R. F. Anderson

Juliet McMaster

John King-Farlow

Robert L. Patten
External Examiner

Date October 1, 1979

To Peter, Catherine-Mary and Benjamin

ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies the development of Dickens's attempts to account for the origin of evil by examining his recurring depictions of the basic conflict between good and evil. The early novels present this largely as a clash between innocence and the demonic. The devil-villain is always much stronger and cleverer than his child-victim, but the child ultimately triumphs over evil with no loss of original innocence. Pickwick's primary emphasis is on the celebration of innocence, and the hint of the demonic in Jingle is left undeveloped, but the more pessimistic perception of evil's power in The Old Curiosity Shop and Oliver Twist results in the appearance of sinister devil-figures like Quilp and Fagin. Barnaby Rudge is a transitional novel in that its focus quickly shifts away from its child-like protagonist to concentrate on the issues of moral responsibility and the limitations of freedom in adult communities.

Although it has been said that the novels of the middle period are characterized by the disappearance of the devil, the significant shift between the early and the middle and late period works has less to do with the absence of devils than with the symbolic functions assigned to them. While devils in the early novels clearly stand for evil as an external principle, figures like Steerforth, Krook, Tulkinghorn, Rigaud, Jasper and others are used in the late novels to typify evil as an inherent quality within the individual or society.

A similar shift may be observed in Dickens's understanding of

innocence. The novels from Pickwick to Dombey tend to equate the innocence of childhood with the "principle of Good" and to define it as an innate incorruptibility, characterized by ignorance and helplessness. Dickens's position up to this point may be defined as Manichean, but David Copperfield reveals a movement towards a position much closer to the traditional notion of a universal fall. All of Dickens's novels after Copperfield are clearly set within a post-lapsarian world; indeed, the reality of the fall is the great central truth of human existence which Esther Summerson must learn to assimilate, while Dickens's last great portrait of innocence, in Little Dorrit, defines it in Miltonic terms not as childish ignorance and passivity, but as a special kind of knowledge and activity.

Dickens's concern with the origins of evil tends to diminish in the late novels as he turns his attention away from the analysis of innocence to concentrate on the problem of guilt and the possibility of redemption. Finally, in Edwin Drood, he reverses the pattern of Oliver Twist to show us a protagonist who must learn to reject the sterile safety of an unnaturally prolonged childhood, and endure the "gritty stages" of a fallen existence in order to achieve true humanity and maturity, while in the figure of John Jasper he shows us how a perverse rejection of trial and conflict brings the demonic into being.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to a number of people and institutions for their assistance during the preparation of this dissertation, and would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude.

First of all, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Professor R. D. McMaster of the University of Alberta, for his wise and patient direction, and for permitting me to benefit by his years of immersion in Dickens scholarship. I am also grateful to Professors Juliet McMaster and Norman Page of the University of Alberta for their advice and comments, and Professors Mildred Gutkin and Robert O'Kell of the University of Manitoba for their unfailing encouragement and support. My husband and children also deserve recognition for their cheerful endurance of a sometimes Jellyby-like environment while I struggled with "my vegetable love."

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the financial assistance of the Canada Council, and of the Department of English of the University of Manitoba, who granted me sufficient study-leave to complete the preliminary requirements for the PhD degree.

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ABBREVIATIONS

PP	Pickwick Papers
OT	Oliver Twist
NN	Nicholas Nickleby
OCS	The Old Curiosity Shop
BR	Barnaby Rudge
MC	Martin Chuzzlewit
D&S	Dombey and Son
DC	David Copperfield
BH	Bleak House
HT	Hard Times
LD	Little Dorrit
TTC	A Tale of Two Cities
GE	Great Expectations
OMF	Our Mutual Friend
ED	The Mystery of Edwin Drood

INTRODUCTION

Edmund Wilson, in his pioneering re-assessment of Dickens, notes the enormous reluctance of the mature novelist to communicate the psychologically searing experiences of his childhood to anyone save his most trusted confidant, John Forster. Wilson further observes that despite Dickens's overt silence on the subject, "the work of [his] whole career was an attempt to digest these early shocks and hardships, to explain them to himself, to justify himself in relation to them, to give an intelligible and tolerable picture of a world in which such things could occur."[1] Professor Wilson's emphasis on the significance of specific early events in the shaping of Dickens's genius is sometimes seen as excessive. Joseph Gold, for example, protests impatiently against critical reliance on what he calls "the ubiquitous and now boring story of Dickens's childhood and the blacking warehouse experience."[2] The real value of Wilson's comments, however, lies not so much in his psychological analysis of the causes of a recurring concern in Dickens's works, as in his identification of that concern itself.

This thesis will contend that Dickens's need "to give an intelligible and tolerable picture of a world" in which innocence suffers is nothing less than an attempt to account for the existence of evil; that his explorations of this issue constitute a recurring and major theme throughout his career and take shape in an orderly and progressive development stretching from _Pickwick Papers_ to _Edwin Drood_.

Dickens's efforts to grapple with what some theologians have called "the problem of pain"[3] give to all his work (as the titles of a couple of recent works suggest[4]) a strong moral preoccupation. The origin of evil, its nature in relation to man, the nature of man himself as a being inherently innocent, depraved or somewhere in between, are issues to which Dickens addresses himself throughout the whole course of his career.

In this thesis, I shall attempt to trace the progressive development of Dickens's understanding of "the problem of pain" by examining his recurring depictions of the basic conflict between good and evil. In the early novels (from Pickwick to Barnaby Rudge) he presents this largely as a clash between innocence and the demonic. In what is perhaps a recapitulation of his own youthful predicament he pits a child or child-like protagonist against a demonic villain. The devil is, of course, much stronger and much cleverer than the child, but the child is ultimately allowed to triumph over evil with no loss of original innocence. In Pickwick, Dickens's primary emphasis is on the celebration of innocence; something faintly demonic is perhaps suggested in the figure of Alfred Jingle, but this is never really developed, and Jingle remains basically a charming and amoral eccentric. In Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop, however, a more pessimistic awareness of the power of evil to corrupt and destroy leads to the appearance of sinister devil-figures like Fagin and Quilp who, for no very clear reason, suddenly choose to direct all their malevolence against a hapless child-victim. Barnaby Rudge, I will argue, must be seen within the context of Dickens's early works as a transitional novel in that the focus of that work quickly moves away from emphasis on its child-like protagonist to concentrate on the issues of moral responsibility and the limitations of freedom in adult communities.

The novels of Dickens's middle period, according to Q. D. Leavis,[5] are characterized by the disappearance of the devil. Mrs. Leavis's contention, however, while basically true of a mid-period novel like Martin Chuzzlewit, tends to overlook the presence of a large number of clearly demonic personages who figure in Dickens's works right up until the end of his career. These figures include Mr. Carker in Dombey and Son; Heep and Steerforth in David Copperfield; a whole galaxy of imps and demons in Bleak House, including the Smallweed family, Krook, Vholes and Tulkinghorn; the clearly Satanic Rigaud in Little Dorrit; Monseigneur and the Marquis d'Evrémonde, the diabolical aristocrats of A Tale of Two Cities; as well, of course, as John Jasper, the villain of Edwin Drood. The significant shift between the early novels and the work of the middle and late Dickens has less to do with the appearance or non-appearance of specific devil-figures than with the symbolic functions assigned to them. In the early novels, as I shall demonstrate, devils clearly stand for evil perceived as something external to human nature. In the novels of Dickens's maturity, however, devil figures are used to typify evil defined as something inherently within the individual or his society.

This thesis will trace a similar shift in Dickens's understanding of the meaning of innocence. The novels from Pickwick to Dombey, in spite of a certain ambivalence best reflected perhaps in Barnaby Rudge, all tend to equate the innocence of childhood with "the principle of Good,"[6] and to define it as an innate incorruptibility, characterized by an appealing helplessness and vulnerability. In thus presenting childhood as a moral ideal, Dickens inevitably slips into an unconscious Manichaeism which tries to depict the complex interaction between good and evil in human communities as a simple opposition between moral absolutes.[7] David Copperfield, however, with its sympathetic but unsentimental examination of childhood's natural egocentricity and ignorance reveals a movement towards a position much closer to the traditional notion of a universally fallen humanity. I shall also endeavour to prove that all of Dickens's novels after Copperfield are clearly set within a post-lapsarian world, that the fall, in fact, is the great central truth of human existence that Esther Summerson of Bleak House must learn to assimilate, and that genuine innocence, when it makes its appearance within the prison world of Little Dorrit, is startlingly unlike anything exhibited by earlier innocents like Oliver, Nell, Barnaby, or the Dombey children.

In the concluding chapter of this study, I shall try to show how Dickens's concern with the origins of evil tends to diminish in the great symbolic works of the late period. Once Dickens has fully accepted the notion that evil originates, not in some force external to man, but from within the human heart itself, he turns away from the analysis of innocence to concentrate on the problem of guilt and tries to show how less-than-perfect human beings might achieve some sort of redemption or liberation within the confines of a fallen world. And finally, in an extended discussion of Edwin Drood, I intend to show how that novel, despite its unfinished state, can be read as a fitting conclusion to Dickens's life-long struggle to deal with the problem of evil.

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY NOVELS: INNOCENCE, DEVILS AND DEATH

Introduction

In this first chaper, I have selected four of the early novels for discussion: The Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist, The Old Curiosity Shop and Barnaby Rudge. All four of these novels employ the same basic pattern: a child or child-like hero or heroine is suddenly brought face to face with the reality of evil. Evil (in every case but one personified by a devil figure) is depicted as a force external to the child, and motivated by the desire to corrupt innocence. In these early works, innocence invariably triumphs, even if, as in one case, it must die in order to do so, and the devil is always routed, even if the rout is not always entirely convincing. I shall touch only very briefly on Nicholas Nickleby. Although it contains some wonderful bits of invention, it is a relatively unstructured novel, and does not, in any case, employ the pattern I have been describing.

The concentration on innocence in these four novels brings out some interesting points about its characteristics. In The Pickwick Papers innocence stands out as a moral ideal by which one can judge the world. Within the context of the novel, goodness and innocence appear to be one and the same. Pickwick triumphs, not so much as the result of anything he does, but more in consequence of what he is. The victory of innocence in Pickwick is a convincing and satisfying conclusion to the novel, but it is important to note that it is an outcome assured at least as much by the safeguards and protectors with which Dickens has surrounded his hero as by the essential nature of Pickwick himself. If Pickwick is, as Auden claimed,[1] an unfallen Adam, he is an Adam blessed with a Cockney nanny.

A more self-pitying and sentimental tone creeps into the second novel. All four novels involve to some extent a re-enactment of Dickens's own childhood trauma, and Oliver, like Pickwick, is another version of the author, but younger, smaller, and much more put upon. Unlike Pickwick, he has nothing with which to defend himself but his own inviolable innocence, a quality which has miraculously flourished in the most hostile environments. It is in this novel that one begins to see difficulties emerging from Dickens's treatment of innocence. Oliver is supposed to triumph over the demonic forces which beset him, but the very helplessness and weakness which make him such a pathetic victim preclude this possibility without the intervention of outside saviours. In addition, the equation of goodness with childlike innocence here creates a reluctance on Dickens's part to let Oliver grow beyond childhood, and the unnatural prolongation of childish dependency which one perceives in the final pages of the novel begins to appear as a form of death.

The Old Curiosity Shop was written under the impact of Mary Hogarth's death, and the suggestion that innocence is best preserved by death, which hovers round the fringes of Oliver Twist, here emerges full blown. The novel appears to argue that if childhood innocence is good, death in childhood is even better, since it prevents any possibility of change. This novel is also important for its connection with the Victorian cult of death, particularly as it manifested itself in response to the deaths of children.

The Old Curiosity Shop seems to have enabled Dickens to rid himself, at least for a while, of his preoccupation with innocence. It is significant that in the last novel of the group, the activities of the innocent Barnaby actually occupy a much less significant place in the novel than the struggles of characters like Joe Willet, Edward Haredale and Sim Tappertit to achieve independence from their fathers and masters.

In the discussion to follow, I shall not only be attempting to trace the evolution of Dickens's notions of childhood and innocence, I shall also devote part of my analysis to the devil-antagonists of each novel. At the beginning of Dickens's career, his optimistic faith in man (not just children) was such that it was necessary for him to postulate a devil in order to account for the existence of evil. This is of very slight significance in The Pickwick Papers, since the main focus of the novel is on innocence; the existence of evil is simply taken for granted and its sources not very deeply enquired into, but in Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop the demonic Quilp and Fagin are of major significance in the development of the novel. The devils in Barnaby Rudge, Sir John Chester and Mr. Gashford, are presented with a certain element of ambiguity. They are important movers of events within the novel, but at the same time, Dickens attempts to explain human conduct within the context of social and environmental forces. The simplistic explanation that men commit evil acts because a devil corrupted or tricked them into doing so is put forward with far less confidence than in, for example, Oliver Twist, where even Sikes's brutal murder of Nancy can be seen to result from Fagin's manipulation.

The Pickwick Papers

The Pickwick Papers is necessarily of considerable importance in any discussion of Dickens's development. As most critics have long recognized, it is a work that begins in sunlight and jollity, gradually darkening with the imprisonment of Mr. Pickwick in the Fleet, and lightening in tone again in its serene conclusion. Just how systematically the pattern is developed is a question which has much exercised modern critics of Dickens. While G. K. Chesterton, with his usual disconcerting combination of insight and what Edmund Wilson called "pseudo-poetic booziness,"[2] argued for a mythological interpretation as early as 1906,[3] until fairly recently The Pickwick Papers was most often regarded as a marvellously funny, but essentially disjointed and rambling collection of jokes and anecdotes. Whether it could be seriously regarded as a novel at all was, and still is, a question of some importance. One of the earliest reviews of the work referred to it somewhat slightingly as a compound made up of "two pounds of Smollett, three ounces of Sterne, a handful of Hook [and] a dash of a grammatical Pierce Egan."[4] Modern criticism is agreed on the greatness of the work, but in many instances seems at a loss to account for it, chiefly because of the book's apparent lack of unity. Edgar Johnson speaks of its "inadvertent"[5] greatness and suggests that "powers within its author more vital than any of his conscious powers had siezed upon him and declared themselves."[6] Although he believes that a kind of unity is achieved through the development of the theme of injustice which dominates the latter half of the novel, he dismisses the interpolated tales as clumsy,[7] calling them a "small mud-clogged backwater in the clear and sparkling flood of Pickwick."[8] Steven

Marcus echoes Chesterton, describing Mr. Pickwick as "projected . . . in quasi-mythical terms, as if he were a kind of demi-god come to visit the earth."[9] Unlike Johnson, he is willing to grant thematic significance to at least one of the interpolated tales ("The Old Man's Tale About the Queer Client") but he deplores its "wretched incompetence."[10] Sylvère Monod is even more severe in his evaluation. He argues that the work has not one, but four, plots and identifies them as the Pickwick-Bardell trial, the adventures of the Wardle family, the pursuit of Jingle and the Weller saga.[11] "The absence of a well thought out plan and the lack of internal unity are striking."[12] W. H. Auden in his essay on Pickwick in The Dyer's Hand argues provocatively that the work is unified by the appearance of an allegory of the fall with Mr. Jingle as a comic serpent and Mr. Pickwick as a nineteenth-century pre-lapsarian Adam. At the same time, however, Auden confesses his suspicion that Dickens himself was unaware of what he had achieved:

> . . . the real theme of Pickwick Papers--I am not saying that Dickens was consciously aware of it, and indeed, I am pretty certain he was not--is the Fall of Man. It is the story of a man who is innocent, that is to say, who has not eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and is, therefore, living in Eden. He then eats of the Tree, that is to say, he becomes conscious of the reality of Evil but, instead of falling from innocence into sin--this is what makes him a mythical character--he changes from an innocent child into an innocent adult who no longer lives in an imaginary Eden of his own but in the real and fallen world.[13]

Although Auden is somewhat tentative in his conclusions and willing to grant that much of what he finds in the novel probably crept into it unknown to its author, his essay has had an important influence on subsequent Pickwick studies. A number of recent critics, basing their work upon Auden's notion of a descent from innocence to experience, have argued that Pickwick is actually a much more tightly structured work than has been generally recognized. In their view, every incident in the novel can be interpreted as contributing to this central theme. The interpolated tales, as one might expect, have presented something of a problem, but even they have not lacked defenders.[14] One of the most detailed arguments in favor of the total coherence of The Pickwick Papers appears in an article by James R. Kincaid.[15] Kincaid begins by identifying the major theme of the novel: the movement of Mr. Pickwick from a bland and inhuman innocence through the experience of suffering to a fuller and more adult humanity. The novel then becomes the story of the education of Mr. Pickwick through the agency of his tutor, Sam Weller, who, with his grimly comic asides and anecdotes, forces his master to see the world through human eyes. The interpolated tales serve a similar educative function. In Kincaid's analysis every tale and every word of Sam's has a strong thematic significance. When Sam tells Pickwick about his father's coach-tipping involvement in an election campaign, he is "forc[ing] grim reality onto Mr. Pickwick's . . . demand for comic reassurance,"[16] and when he recounts the adventures of the crumpet-eating gentleman, he is reading his master a moral lecture which "embodies the major protest against sterile and rigid abstraction; they are opposed to life and resiliency and lay an invalid foundation for a true identity."[17]

These efforts to rescue Pickwick from the charge of structural disunity by identifying the fall allegory as the central theme all depend upon the assumption that the hero does indeed change. In response to contemporary readers who thought he did, but who saw this as a weakness rather than a strength, Dickens himself replied that the change took place mainly in our own perceptions of Mr. Pickwick:

> It has been observed of Mr. Pickwick, that there is a decided change in his character, as these pages proceed, and that he becomes more good and more sensible. I do not think this change will appear forced or unnatural to my readers, if they will reflect that in real life the peculiarities and oddities of a man who has anything whimsical about him, generally impress us first, and that it is not until we are better acquainted with him that we usually begin to look below these superficial traits, and to know the better part of him. (PP, Preface, p. xii)[18]

This remark has sometimes been cited as an example of Dickens's ingenuousness, but he is often a better guide to the understanding of his own work than he is given credit for. The fall allegory as it pertains to Pickwick Papers is an appealing hypothesis for a number of reasons, but crucial to its validity is a significant change, not in our perceptions of Mr. Pickwick, but in his perceptions of the world around him. I do not think that a careful examination of the later sections of the novel reveals this to be the case. The Fleet episode, as the climax of Pickwick's adventures, has some superficial resemblances to the Red Cross Knight's imprisonment in Orgoglio's dungeon, and can be interpreted as a descent from innocence to experience, or as a parallel to Adam's exile from Eden. But, as many critics have pointed out,[19] Pickwick's sufferings in the Fleet consist largely in observing the misery of others. Pickwick himself, after the first night, is insulated from the most severe consequences of debtor's prison by his money. He is looked after by Sam and consoled by the visits of his friends. One does not wish to undervalue the painfulness of his loss of liberty, nor the sympathetic suffering he undergoes, but compared with the miserable wretches of the Poor Side, Mr. Pickwick is pretty well off. One also finds oneself asking some questions about the event which secures Mr. Pickwick's release. He pays Mrs. Bardell's costs, but his motives are unclear. A neat working out of the fall allegory would seem to demand that the man who clung so tenaciously to the idea of his own innocence, who placed selfish principle above compassion and wisdom, should come to a full recognition of his folly. A prompt and spontaneous forgiveness of Mrs. Bardell would demonstrate not only such a recognition, but Pickwick's perception of mankind's common sinfulness. This is not what happens. Although Sam and Mr. Perker see immediately what Pickwick ought to do once Mrs. Bardell has been imprisoned, it takes some time and considerable argument before Pickwick can be brought round to their point of view.[20] Even when he is, it is not clear whether he has decided to pay Mrs. Bardell's costs out of compassion for her, or because Mr. Winkle, Jr. has entreated him so vigorously to go to Birmingham on his behalf. It is true that this final journey gives us a glimpse (though little more than that) of an industrial England quite unlike the world of coaching-inns and middle-class spas in which the bulk of the action has taken place up to this point. It is tempting to view this, along with Mr. Pickwick's uncharacteristic failure to move Winkle, Sr., and (in a novel in which sunlight predominates) the wet and miserable morning that greets him as he prepared to leave Birmingham, as evidence that Mr. Pickwick is now truly inhabiting a fallen world. But one must also taken account of Philip Rogers' observation that the journey to Birmingham, a rollicking progress with key-bugles, milk-punch and horseplay, is no different in kind from any of the previous expeditions.[21] And while Adam had to leave the Garden to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, and the Red Cross Knight had to endure the painful purgation of the House of Holiness and the terrifying encounter with the dragon, Mr. Pickwick retires to a snug cottage and the tender ministrations of Sam and Mary with his innocence intact.

We love Mr. Pickwick, not so much for what he becomes, but for what he is. He is supposed to be a well-to-do, elderly adult, but in many respects he is really a child, a placid, sweet-natured, nice child. Our first glimpse of him, after that heavy-handed and rather unfortunate opening chapter, describes him "bursting from his slumbers like another sun" (PP, p. 7). He looks upon the world beneath his chamber window:

> Goswell Street was at his feet, Goswell Street was on his right hand--as far as the eye could reach, Goswell Street extended on his left; and the opposite side of Goswell Street was over the way. (PP, p. 7)

And, like the child who begins to realize that the four walls of his nursery do not constitute the whole of reality, he decides to go exploring:

> "Such," thought Mr. Pickwick, "are the narrow views of those philosophers who, content with examining the things that lie before them, look not to the truths which are hidden beyond. As well might I be content to gaze on Goswell Street forever, without one effort to penetrate to the hidden countries which on every side surround it." (PP, p. 7)

His very first foray into the "hidden countries" brings him into contact with a London cab-driver who immediately recognizes the naive child behind the plump and elderly exterior:

> "How old is that horse, my friend:" inquired Mr. Pickwick, rubbing his nose with the shilling he had reserved for the fare.
>
> "Forty-two," replied the driver, eyeing him askant.
>
> "What!" ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, laying his hand upon his note-book. The driver reiterated his former statement. Mr. Pickwick looked very hard at the man's face, but his features were immovable, so he noted down the fact forthwith.
>
> "And how long do you keep him out at a time?" inquired Mr. Pickwick, searching for further information.
>
> "Two or three veeks," replied the man.
>
> "Weeks!" said Mr. Pickwick in astonishment--and out came the

> note-book again.
>
> "He lives at Pentonwil when he's at home," observed the driver, coolly, "But we seldom takes him home, on account of his veakness."
>
> "On account of his weakness!" reiterated the perplexed Mr. Pickwick.
>
> "He always falls down when he's took out o' the cab," continued the driver, "but when he's in it, we bears him up werry tight, and takes him in werry short, so as he can't werry well fall down; and we've got a pair o' precious large wheels on, so ven he does move, they run after him, and he must go on--he can't help it."
>
> Mr. Pickwick entered every word of this statement in his note-book, with the view of communicating it to the club, as a singular instance of the tenacity of life in horses, under trying circumstances. (PP, p. 7)

This passage has often been cited as evidence that Dickens's initial conception of Mr. Pickwick was as the butt of a satire against foolish pedantry. This probably was indeed part of Dickens's intention; it accords with the description of Pickwick's researches into Hampstead tittlebats and the famous Bill Stumps episode, but what strikes me more strongly in the passage is the tone of Dickens's description of the interaction between Mr. Pickwick and the cabby. Pickwick is half-incredulous and half-persuaded; the cabman is obviously enjoying himself. He plays the role of the adult who gets pleasure out of telling children preposterous fibs and watching their reactions. Pickwick is the child who is not sure whether he is being made a fool of or not.

Pickwick's response to events is frequently child-like in quality. When he loses his temper, the outburst is usually spontaneous, direct and uncomplicated:

> Rising rage and extreme bewilderment had swelled the noble breast of Mr. Pickwick, almost to the bursting of his waistcoat, during the delivery of the above defiance. He stood transfixed to the spot, gazing on vacancy. The closing of the door recalled him to himself. He rushed forward with fury in his looks, and fire in his eye. His hand was upon the lock of the door; in another instant it would have been upon the throat of Dr. Payne of the 43rd, had not Mr. Snodgrass seized his revered leader by the coat

> tail, and dragged him backwards. (PP, p. 43)

He also shares the child's capacity for moving quickly from frowns to smiles. He relieves his outraged feelings by yelling "Robbers!" out the window at Dodson and Fogg, but "when Mr. Pickwick drew his head in again, his countenance was smiling and placid, and walking quietly back into the office, he declared that he had now removed a great weight from his mind, and that he felt perfectly comfortable and happy" (PP, p. 751). He responds in exactly the same way after being released from the indignity of being shut up in the village pound:

> Do what he would, a smile would come into Mr. Pickwick's face; the smile extended into a laugh; the laugh into a roar; the roar became general. So, to keep up their good humour, they stopped at the first roadside tavern they came to, and ordered a glass of brandy and water for all round, with a magnum of extra strength for Mr. Samuel Weller. (PP, p. 261)

His perceptions of the world are those of a child who observes accurately, but who lacks the experience to interpret what he sees. James R. Kincaid cites the following passage in which Mr. Pickwick describes the antics of drunken soldiers reeling down the streets of Rochester as evidence of the insensitivity which he thinks is an aspect of Pickwick's early inhuman innocence:[22]

> "It is truly delightful to a philanthropic mind, to see these gallant men staggering along under the influence of an overflow, both of animal and ardent spirits; more especially when we remember that the following them about, and jesting with them, affords a cheap and innocent amusement for the boy population. Nothing (adds Mr. Pickwick) can exceed their good humour. It was but the day before my arrival that one of them had been most grossly insulted in the house of a publican. The barmaid had positively refused to draw him any more liquor; in return for which he had (merely in playfulness) drawn his bayonet, and wounded the girl in the shoulder. And yet this fine fellow was the very first to go down to the house next morning, and express his readiness to overlook the matter, and forget what had occurred." (PP, p. 14)

I would judge this less harshly as a child's view of something he is not capable of understanding.

His amusements are those of a child; sliding on the ice, playing games, listening to stories. He hears a number of horrific tales of blood and thunder in the course of his adventures, but they have no power to disturb his serenity or interfere with his slumbers. He retires to bed immediately after hearing the dreadful history of the Convict's Return, but "the fatiguing adventures of the day or the somniferous influence of the clergyman's tale operated so strongly on the drowsy tendencies of Mr. Pickwick, that in less than five minutes after he had been shown to his comfortable bedroom, he fell into a sound and dreamless sleep" (PP, p. 82). This tale of parricide and remorse has no more effect on the innocent Pickwick than a child's bed-time story. He rather enjoys kissing pretty girls under the mistletoe at Dingley Dell, but he also has something of the asexual nature which the Victorians tended to attribute to children. The episode at the Great White Horse Inn in which he finds himself in a lady's bedroom and the scene outside the young ladies' seminary at Bury St. Edmunds are funny precisely because the whole idea of Pickwick as sexual aggressor is so absurd.

Pickwick loves good food and drink with a kind of innocent greediness. Even his drinking, which one might regard as a particularly unchildlike occupation, only reinforces our impression of his basically child-like nature:

> Yielding by degrees to the influence of the exciting liquor, rendered more so by the heat, Mr. Pickwick expressed a strong desire to recollect a song which he had heard in his infancy, and the attempt proving abortive, sought to stimulate his memory with more glasses of punch, which appeared to have quite a contrary effect: for, from forgetting the words of the song; he began to

> forget how to articulate any words at all; and finally, after rising to his legs to address the company in an eloquent speech, he fell into the barrow, and fast asleep, simultaneously. (PP, p. 257)

Steven Marcus, singling out this passage for comment, remarks that "when Pickwick tries to recall his past, the only thing he can do is become like an infant again; first he forgets how to speak, then he drops into the barrow, which we suddenly recognize as a perambulator, and into sleep."[28] I would suggest that it is not so much a case of Mr. Pickwick's becoming like a baby, as having certain infant-like characteristics all along. Chesterton notes "the round, moon-like face, the round moon-like spectacles . . . emblems of a certain spherical simplicity [and the eyes] fixed in that grave surprise that may be seen in babies."[24]

Sam Weller has often been seen as Pickwick's tutor, instructing him in such matters as two-penny ropes and the relationship between poverty and oyster stalls, but he is not only Pickwick's schoolmaster, he is his nursemaid as well, and watches over his elderly charge in order to protect him from harm. His first realization of what his function is to be comes after he has guided his thoroughly confused master back to his room in the Great White Horse Inn:

> "Sam," said Mr. Pickwick as he got into bed, "I have made one of the most extraordinary mistakes tonight, that ever were heard of."
>
> "Wery likely, sir," replied Mr. Weller, drily.
>
> "But of this I am determined, Sam," said Mr. Pickwick; "that if I were to stop in this house for six months, I would never trust myself about it, alone, again."
>
> "That's the wery prudentest resolution as you could come to, sir," replied Mr. Weller. "You rayther want somebody to look arter you, sir, when your judgement goes out a wisitin'."
>
> "What do you mean by that, Sam?" said Mr. Pickwick. He raised himself in bed, and extended his hand, as if he were about to say something here; but suddenly checking himself, turned around, and bade his valet "Good night."

> "Good night, sir," replied Mr. Weller. He paused when he got outside the door--shook his head--walked on--stopped--snuffed the candle--shook his head again--and finally proceeded slowly to his chamber, apparently buried in the profoundest meditation. (PP, p. 312)

By the time the action has advanced to the Fleet episode, both Sam and his father are fully aware that Pickwick cannot be left to fend for himself:

> "Stop there by himself, poor creetur!" exclaimed the elder Mr. Weller, "without nobody to take his part! It can't be done, Samivel, it can't be done."
>
> "O' course, it can't," asserted Sam: "I know'd that afore I came."
>
> "Wy they'll eat him up alive, Sammy," exclaimed Mr. Weller.
>
> Sam nodded his concurrence in the opinion.
>
> "He goes in rayther raw, Sammy," said Mr. Weller metaphorically, "and he'll come out done so ex-ceedin' brown, that his most familar friends won't know him. Roast pigeons's nothin' to it, Sammy."
>
> Again Sam Weller nodded.
>
> "It oughtn't to be, Samivel," said Mr. Weller gravely.
>
> "It mustn't be," said Sam. (PP, p. 608)

Nor does Pickwick ever outgrow the need for Sam's guardianship. When his master tries to argue, near the end of the novel, that he can manage without Sam, Sam exclaims with some indignation, "'what 'ud become on you vithout me? It can't be done, sir, it can't be done'" (PP, p. 789). Sam accounts for the paradox of Pickwick's elderly appearance and youthful behavior by suggesting that "'his heart must ha' been born five-and-twenty year arter his body, at least!'" (PP, p. 556). He and his father are not the only ones to regard Pickwick in this light; Wardle calls him "'a fiery young fellow'" (PP, p. 755), and Mrs. Raddle is outraged by his failure to act his age: "'Old enough to be his grandfather, you willin! You're worse than any of 'em'" (PP, p. 446). His fellow prisoners in the Fleet are astounded at his naivete: "'Well, if I knew as little of life as that I'd eat my hat and swallow the buckle whole'" (PP, p. 592).

I remarked earlier that it is not Pickwick who changes in the course of the book, but we who alter in our appreciation of him and what he stands for. In this respect he is very much like Don Quixote. Cervantes sets out to mock the literary tradition of chivalric romance by creating a naively romantic hero whose gaunt and rawboned appearance is ludicrously at odds with his pretensions to knight-errantry, a hero whose brains have been so addled by his obsessive reading of chivalric literature that he cannot distinguish between giants and windmills, brass basins and golden helmets, squalid inns and noble castles. At first we find ourselves responding with amused condescension to his absurd antics, but as the narrative proceeds, Don Quixote's vision of a world of chivalry, grace and courtesy begins to make every day reality seem increasingly mean and sordid, while Quixote himself comes to represent humane and noble virtues neglected by a crass and brutal society. When Dickens "thought of Mr. Pickwick," he apparently thought of a harmless pedant whose collisions with reality would be the principal source of humour in the book; but this aspect of Pickwick's character quickly recedes into the background, while his other, more child-like qualities receive more prominence. Pickwick, with his wide-eyed naivete, frequently barks his shins against the obstacles presented by a society in which self-interest and sly cunning are the order of the day, and his mishaps _are_ funny, but our response quickly changes from amused superiority to affection, admiration and respect. Mr. Perker may cluck with dismay at Pickwick's imprudent outburst against Dodson and Fogg, but the reader applauds. Like Quixote, Pickwick stands for a moral ideal.

Although Pickwick himself exhibits the virtues of childhood--innocence, unselfconscious enthusiasm, spontaneity and sympathy--the "hidden countries" which he explores are full of misery and corruption. One has to be very careful here not to distort the tone of the work: Dickens is not Swift, and his attack on early nineteenth-century society is tempered by optimism, good humour, and above all, his comic vision. Nevertheless, having said that, one must go on to admit that behind that comedy lies a pretty ugly picture. Hypocrisy, vanity, and pride are to be found at all levels of society, from the Dockyard Ball at Chatham and the aimless gatherings in the Pump Room at Bath, to the hilarious footmen's "Swarry" and the Methodist tea-parties of Stiggins and Mrs. Weller. Important social and political institutions are in the hands of knaves and fools. Law is subverted by Dodson and Fogg, justice by Magistrate Nupkins, religion by Stiggins and company, the press by Mr. Pott and his rival editor. The women in the novel, with the possible exception of Mary, are either scheming females like Rachael Wardle and Mrs. Bardell, domestic tyrants like Mrs. Potts and Mrs. Raddle, or brainless beauties like the young ladies of Dingley Dell. The more spectacular forms of evil--murder, madness, and violence--are introduced into the world of the novel through the medium of the interpolated tales.

In the next few novels that follow Pickwick Papers Dickens tends to depict evil as concentrated in one or more clearly demonic figures whose function is to try to destroy the innocence of the protagonist. Pickwick's adversary, however, is not so much any one specific individual, as it is the world itself. Mrs. Bardell is not really a wicked woman, nor have Dodson and Fogg any particular animus against Pickwick, but when the opportunity arises to enrich themselves at his expense, the three combine to take him to court, and eventually to send him to prison. A case can be made, however, for seeing Jingle as the forerunner of the later, more fully developed devil figures. Auden calls Jingle the serpent in the Garden of Eden,[25] and the first few chapters of the work would seem to support his contention. An "insinuating gentleman" (PP, p. 105), who functions as "a snake in the grass" (PP, p. 105), Jingle shatters the peace of the paradisal Dingley Dell--"the time was evening: the scene the garden" (PP, p. 107). He also displays something of the verve and dash one associates with the Satanic heroes of gothic romance. One recalls his cool impudence when confronted by Pickwick's righteous wrath both at the White Hart Inn and in Nupkins' parlour at Ipswich. At the Inn, having been exposed as a cheap fortune-hunter, he calmly crumples up the marriage license and tosses it to Pickwick with a cheeky "for Tuppy" (PP, p. 131), and at Ipswich he lounges in the parlour, "a smile on his face, wholly unmoved by his very unpleasant situation" (PP, p. 353), then exits laughing, with a wink and a bow. At one point, his machinations rouse Mr. Pickwick to such a paroxysm of anger, that, in a gesture recalling Luther's famous response to the devil, "he hurled the inkstand madly forward, and followed it up himself" (PP, p. 131), but it is difficult for the reader to share Pickwick's indignation. Most of Jingle's victims deserve what they get. In addition, he drops out of the narrative long before the climactic trial scene, and when he reappears in the Fleet, chastened and downcast, he is permitted to reform and go off to a new life in Demerara. The main thrust of Pickwick Papers has been to extoll the virtues of child-like innocence. Dickens is not so much interested in this novel in depicting evil's assault on the innocent (the principal burden of Oliver Twist and the Old Curiosity Shop) as he has been to show how mean and contemptible the values of the adult world look when set against the radiant innocence of Mr. Pickwick. The figure of the devil is of far less importance in this work than the figure of the eternal child who confounds the world of experience by his mere existence.

Oliver Twist

In the introduction to this thesis, I quoted Edmund Wilson's contention that the Blacking Warehouse episode provided an important key to Dickens's artistic development. I am not concerned in this discussion with the psychological scars the experience may have inflicted upon his personality, although these were doubtless very great; what I find more interesting is the use to which it was put by his imagination. Those few months which he spent wandering, a friendless and unhappy child, through the streets of London, marked for him the end of childhood, a critical period during which "I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond."[26] In his early novels he returns again and again to the theme of the child, or child-like figure who encounters evil (after Pickwick generally in the form of one or more demonic figures) in the course of a journey. Dickens, in the most autobiographical of his novels, described David Copperfield's fear, after his rescue and enrollment in Dr. Strong's Academy, that his schoolmates might discover the guilty sophistication he had acquired:

> I was so conscious of having passed through scenes of which they could have no knowledge, and of having acquired experiences foreign to my age, appearance, and condition as one of them, that I

> half-believed it was an imposture to come there as an ordinary little school boy . . . Troubled as I was, by my want of boyish skill and of book learning too, I was made infinitely more uncomfortable by the consideration that, in what I did know, I was much further removed from my companions than in what I did not. (DC, p. 229)

His fictional counterparts in the early novels (Pickwick, Oliver, and Nell) emerge, however, from their ordeals with their innocence unscathed. Their physical sufferings, as in the case of Oliver and Nell, may be immense, but it is their purity, rather than their guilty knowledge, that sets them off from their fellows. Only in Pickwick Papers is this outcome fully satisfying, or even convincing. While few readers would fault the conclusion of that novel, Dickens's attempts to give similar "happy" endings to Oliver Twist and the Old Curiosity Shop (and to a lesser extent, Barnaby Rudge) have been criticized by many readers for sentimentality and evasion.

There are a number of reasons, I believe, why the conclusion of Pickwick is more satisfactory than the endings of the other early novels. Pickwick, as a moral ideal, belongs to the mythic world where it is of the proper nature of things that virtue should ultimately triumph and evil fail, the kind of world in which we can easily believe that "they all lived happily ever after." But this is not the only reason. Although Pickwick encounters various manifestations of evil in the course of his rambles, the consequences are generally more comic than pathetic, and the main impression left with the reader is of what Hood called "the goodness of Pickwickedness."[27] Pickwick himself is the source of the work's vitality, while evil is prevented from touching him too nearly by the layers of insulation with which Dickens has surrounded him. Although childlike in character and outlook, his physical adulthood gives him a measure of freedom and independence not enjoyed by actual children. In addition, he is further defended by his wealth, his circle of loving, if somewhat foolish, friends, and most of all, by his wise and conscientious guardian. In depicting the conflict between innocence and experience in Pickwick Papers, Dickens was careful to bolster innocence with strong material advantages. In Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop, the child-protagonists are denied this kind of protection; in effect, their innocence, at least until Dickens swings the emergency rescue teams into operation, is their only defence. Fagin and Quilp, incarnations of evil who embody all the world's wickedness assaulting childhood's purity, are given all the best lines and depicted with such crackling intensity that they run away with the novels, and, in the opinion of some, the reader's sympathies as well.

When one turns to a more specific examination of one of these post-Pickwick novels, Oliver Twist, one is immediately struck by the drastic change in atmosphere that pervades this novel: "from the sunny landscape of Pickwick, no more than dappled with shadow, Oliver Twist plunges into a confined world of darkness, an oppressive, lurid intensity from the workhouse to the criminal slum and the jail."[28] There is no softening, as there was in Pickwick, of the facts of pain and suffering by warm-hearted laughter and high-jinks. What humour there is, is bleak and sardonic: witness Bumble's funny, but at the same time, horrible, dialogue with the undertaker on the "elegance" of the parish seal as emblazoned on his buttons:

> " -- dear me, what a very elegant button this is, Mr. Bumble! I never noticed it before."
> "Yes, I think it is rather pretty," said the beadle, glancing proudly downwards at the large brass buttons which embellished his coat. "The die is the same as the pororchial seal--the Good

> Samaritan healing the sick and bruised man. The board presented it to me on New-year's morning, Mr. Sowerberry. I put it on, I remember, for the first time, to attend the inquest on that reduced tradesman, who died in a doorway at midnight."
>
> "I recollect," said the undertaker, "The jury brought it in, 'Died from exposure to the cold, and want of the common necessaries of life,' didn't they?"
>
> Mr. Bumble nodded.
>
> "And they made it a special verdict, I think," said the undertaker, "by adding some words to the effect, that if the relieving officer had --"
>
> "Tush! Foolery!" interposed the beadle, "If the board attended to all the nonsense that ignorant jurymen talk, they'd have enough to do." (OT, p. 24)

Pickwick's most painful experience of misery took place when he beheld the starving wretches of the Poor Side. The world of Oliver Twist is that region grown to monstrous proportions. It is as if Dickens, conscious of the restraints which he had placed upon the power of evil in Pickwick, and of the many safeguards with which he had shielded his hero, had decided in his next novel to present the conflict between innocence and evil in almost laboratory-like purity. Innocence is to be put to the test by being embodied in a young child who shall have nothing with which to defend himself but his own invincible purity of heart. "A parish child--the orphan of a workhouse--the humble, half-starved drudge--to be cuffed and buffeted through the world--despised by all and pitied by none" (OT, p. 3), he is born into a world of cruelty and brutality, destined to suffer, but never to fall. Many characters testify to his almost supernatural virtue: when Monks asks Fagin, who has corrupted scores of boys, why he should have had so little success with Oliver, Fagin replies, "I saw it was not easy to train him to the business . . . he was not like other boys in the same circumstances" (OT, p. 193). Barney comments on his angelic countenance: "'Wot an inwalable boy that'll make for the old ladies pockets in chapels! His mug is a fortun' to him'" (OT, p. 159), and Rose Maylie, more elegantly if less vividly, testifies:

> "He is a child of noble nature and a warm heart . . . and that Power which has thought fit to try him beyond his years, has planted in his breast affections and feelings which would do honour to many who have numbered his days six times over!" (OT, p. 311)

The trial of Pickwick's innocence is confined to a period of comparatively short duration--the two years he spends on his rambles after leaving the security of Goswell Street, climaxed by his three months in the Fleet Prison. Pickwick makes a conscious decision to go exploring; his period of imprisonment also depends upon his own choice. But Oliver, who is so much more vulnerable than Pickwick, is allowed no such freedom. Oliver is, from the moment of his birth in the parish workhouse, imprisoned in a world of death and cruelty from which there seems to be no escape. Starved, beaten, terrorized by predictions about the probability of his growing up to be hanged (OT, p. 40), "the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception" (OT, p. 4), he inhabits the sort of world to which, as Joseph Gold has pointed out,[29] the closest twentieth-century parallel is the Nazi death camp. The workhouse system is a vast apparatus for achieving the elimination of poverty through the extermination of the paupers:

> . . . they established the rule, that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not they), of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it. With this view, they contracted with the water-works to lay on an unlimited supply of water; and with a corn-factor to supply periodically small quantities of oatmeal; and issued three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week and half a roll on Sundays . . . It was rather expensive at first, in consequence of the increase in the undertaker's bill, and the necessity of taking in the clothes of all the paupers, which fluttered loosely on their wasted, shrunken forms, after a week or two's gruel. But the number of workhouse inmates got thin as well as the paupers; and the board were in ecstasies. (OT, p. 11)

Joseph Gold has argued that Oliver's flight to London and the arms of Fagin represents a movement from the totally hypocritical and "unreal" (Professor Gold's term) world of the workhouse, to the "real" world of the slum, where "freed from the one great danger, the danger of hypocrisy,"[30] Fagin rescues children from "the starvation gutters of goodness."[31] Gold does not deny that Fagin is a devil, but he contends that in a world as cruel as the workhouse, one which seeks to disguise its true intent behind hypocritical mouthings about Christian charity, the devil becomes "the refuge of the alienated . . . For the outcast it is satisfying to find an omnipotent father figure who specializes in outcasts. To sell oneself to the Devil is to be well looked after and to demonstrate one's hatred of society at one and the same time."[32] Gold adds that Oliver of course refuses to make the transaction, but he also implies that Fagin's world is only regarded as evil by respectable society because it has become a haven for those who are in rebellion against an oppressive system.

This argument has some appeal, and fits in with a common critical notion that Dickens is a writer whose right hand sometimes does not know what his left hand is doing, so that while he may, in a burst of respectability, make sure that Fagin comes to a sticky end, his unconscious sympathies have been with him throughout the greater part of the novel.[33] There is something to be said for the attitude of those who are disturbed by the death-cell scene and by Fagin's cry, "'What right have they to butcher me'" (OT, p. 410), and I will return to this point later. For the moment, I will deal only with the argument, put forward by Professor Gold and others, that we sympathize with Fagin because Dickens means (consciously or unconsciously) that we should see him as a rebel whose valiant efforts to subvert an unjust society have ended in tragic failure. I will begin by noting that the workhouse and the slum are not two separate worlds, divided by radically different values, but part of the same moral universe. The workhouse is a world which has taken to heart Fagin's advice to Noah: "'Some conjurers say that number three is the magic number and some say number seven. It's neither, my friend, neither. It's number one'" (OT, p. 327). Almost every inhabitant of the workhouse world, with the exception of Oliver and Little Dick, pursues his own selfish ends without regard for the needs, the suffering, or the dignity of others. The matron of the baby farm who has Oliver in her charge "had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself. So, she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use and consigned the rising parochial generation to even a shorter allowance than was originally provided for them" (OT, p. 4). The mother of a dead pauper woman weeps after the funeral for the loss, not of her daughter, but of the warm cloak temporarily provided by the undertaker (OT, p. 38). Bumble proposes marriage to Mrs. Corney only after a beady-eyed appraisal of the contents of her apartment (OT, p. 171), and the drunken midwife who assists at Oliver's birth robs his mother's corpse (OT, p. 175). Mrs. Sowerberry wonders aloud whether the starving Oliver is "worth" feeding (OT, p. 27), and the parish beadle laughs heartily as he describes how dying paupers are moved across parish boundaries: "'we find it would come two pound cheaper to move 'em than to bury 'em'" (OT, p. 120). From parish authority to starving pauper, each human being sees his fellow as an object to be used. Perhaps the most naked expression of this attitude is uttered by the workhouse boy who "hinted darkly to his companions that unless he had another basin of gruel per diem, he was afraid he might happen to eat the boy who slept next to him!" (OT, p. 12).

Oliver's attempt to escape from this world only brings him closer to its centre. Although the thieves might appear to have escaped "the great danger--hypocrisy," in that they do not bother to conceal their belief that all men are their legitimate prey, among themselves they make a pretence of community which is even more hypocritical than the "charity" doled out by the white-waist-coated gentlemen of the board. Fagin feeds and shelters Oliver; he even gives him what appears to be his first experience of human fellowship and mirth, but his seeming kindness is only the premium paid for a prospective apprentice-thief. Fagin's world, just as much as the workhouse, is one founded on self-interest and death. Fagin's speech to Noah about the importance of number one goes on to imply that in their mutual concern for number one, the thieves, in effect, create a safe community for each other:

> "To keep my little business all snug, I depend upon you. The first is your number one, the second my number one. The more you value your number one, the more careful you must be of mine; so we come out at last to what I told you at first--that a regard for number one holds us all together, and must do so unless we would all go to pieces in company." (OT, p. 328)

Professor Gold quotes this speech approvingly:

> Because the thieves are outcasts, alienated by race, religion, birth, poverty or temperament, they are forced into a kind of clarity of perception by being unable to shelter behind any of the alienating devices of pretence offered by respectability. Their need to acquire both self-reliance and group protection also makes it necessary for them fully to understand the nature of their own philosophy. In this Fagin is the teacher.[34]

"Their own philosophy," however, with its stress on "number one," is essentially an aspect of the same utilitarian code which motivates the governors of the workhouse. In addition, Fagin is a liar. In his world there is only one number one, himself, and "group protection" is not one of his concerns. In addition to being a receiver of stolen goods and a corrupter of children, Fagin has a profitable side line as a paid informer. He turns in members of his gang, not when their continued liberty poses a threat to the safety of the rest of the gang, but simply when they have ceased to be of practical use to himself:

> "I say," said the other, looking over the rails, and speaking in a harsh whisper; "what a time this would be for a sell! I've got Phil Barker here: so drunk that a boy might take him."
> "Aha! But it's not Phil Barker's time," said the Jew, looking up. "Phil has something more to do, before we can afford to part with him; so go back to the company, my dear, and tell them to lead merry lives--while they last. Ha! ha! ha!" (OT, p. 188)

There is no mutual concern for each other among the members of Fagin's gang. When Oliver is apprehended during the first robbery, Bates and the Dodger take to their heels, abandoning him to his fate (OT, p. 66); Sikes complains bitterly to Fagin of the neglect he suffered during a bout of fever: "'I might have been done for twenty times over, afore you'd have done anything to help me'" (OT, p. 290), and it is Fagin of course who goads Sikes to the murder of Nancy.

Oliver Twist was created, according to Dickens, "to show . . . the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance and triumphing at last." The novel is clearly intended, I believe, to depict the conflict between good and evil in archetypal terms. I have already noted Oliver's almost supernatural goodness. He is obviously the personification of "the principle of Good," while Fagin is just as obviously intended to be regarded as the incarnation of evil. It is unnecessary at this point to prove that Fagin is a devil. A multitude of articles[35] have been written about him, cataloging in exhaustive detail all the allusions to smoke and fire, noting the significance of the epithets applied to him ("the old 'un" and "merry old gentleman"), enumerating the many occasions on which the term devil is specifically applied to him, and investigating the folk, literary, and stage origins of the characterization. Pickwick's encounter with the fallen world brings him into contact with corrupt institutions, arrogant, venal and stupid men, vain and silly women, but in Oliver Twist all this is reduced finally to one grim struggle between two individual figures--a child and a devil. When goodness is equated with childhood innocence, a devil figure is almost a logical necessity. If the child is supposed to be representative of mankind in any way, and if he is made to suffer through no fault of his own, then one must look to something outside of man to explain the origin of the evil that attacks him. A demonic power whose motives are mysteriously obscure and who corrupts other men (who must once themselves have been innocent little children) as his instruments is a plausible explanation. In this connection it is important to note that one of Fagin's primary functions in the novel is as a corrupter of children. His gang is composed of young boys, and adults who first encountered him in childhood. Nancy describes the role he has played in her life:

> "I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old at this!" pointing to Oliver. "I have been in the same trade, and in the same service, for twelve years since. . . . the cold, wet dirty streets are my home; and you're the wretch that drove me to them long ago, and that'll keep me there, day and night, day and night, till I die!" (OT, p. 116)

Dickens intends Fagin to attempt a similar role with Oliver. A large portion of the novel is given over to three temptation scenes in which Fagin tries to seduce Oliver into becoming a thief. The first occurs just after Oliver's arrival in London after his escape from Sowerberry, and the bait is simple creature comforts and human companionship. It ends with Oliver's thunderstruck response to his first sight of a robbery and his desertion by Bates and the Dodger. The second takes place after his recapture by the gang, and is slightly more complex. He is first of all prepared psychologically by being held in isolation for a few days, and is then released to be dazzled with visions of wealth, entertained by funny stories about Fagin's criminal exploits in his younger days, and treated to the moral sophistry of his youthful companions. The third is the most difficult of the three. Oliver is forced at gunpoint to assist in the "cracking of a crib" at Chertsey, and made to choose between criminality and death. Naturally, he would rather die:

> . . . in the short time he had had to collect his senses, the boy had firmly resolved that, whether he died in the attempt or not, he would make one effort to dart up stairs from the hall, and alarm the family. (OT, p. 163)

The point of these scenes is, I think, to convey an even more condensed, black and white version of the basic moral conflict which the book sets out to explore. In addition, these scenes reveal the essential continuity of the workhouse world with the world of the slum and thieves' den. Oliver's oppressors under the New Poor Law have a fairly simple object in view--to kill him--but Fagin's gang takes the assault on innocence one step further. Oliver is tempted by a devil to embrace the moral values, symbolically expressed as thievery, of the system that has sought to destroy him. If Fagin succeeds, it is not so much Oliver's physical being that will be destroyed (although the many references to the gallows suggest that as a probable side effect), but his spiritual being. He will be, in Fagin's words, "'Ours, ours for life!'" (OT, p. 141).

Oliver successfully resists all attempts to destroy his innocence, but the means by which he does so reside less in the innate strength of that quality than in the Brownlow-Maylie deus ex machina that moves in to rescue him at critical junctures. I said earlier that Dickens, after Pickwick, apparently wished to show unaided innocence in operation, and this is what he gives us for the first eleven chapters. Oliver shut up in the coal-cellar at the baby farm, subjected to near starvation and ogreish threats at the poor house, almost fainting with terror at the prospect of being made an apprentice sweep, and fleeing to London while farmers threaten to set the dogs on him is a compelling figure precisely because he is so alone; but when Dickens changes the emphasis from physical to moral danger, Oliver, although still much more vulnerable than Pickwick ever was, suddenly becomes the object of one of those benevolent conspiracies of fairy godfathers and godmothers that Dickens was to use repeatedly in his next few novels and to which he returned with devastating ironic effect in Great Expectations, where the boy's apparent saviours are instruments in his further corruption.

Childhood innocence, as the novel depicts it in the person of Oliver, is primarily a passive quality, and as such, if it is to survive, it requires propping up by forces outside itself. Those children in Dickens who are able to survive in an adult world (the

Artful Dodger in Oliver Twist and Young Bailey of Martin Chuzzlewit come to mind) do so by out-playing the adults at their own games. In a world of imposture, they become adept at slipping from one rôle to another. One recalls Poll Sweedlepipe's bemused acquiesence in Bailey's demand for a shave, and the Dodger's magnificent speech to the judge. They survive by sacrificing precisely those qualities in childhood which Dickens seems most to admire: dependence, passivity, and a kind of moral transparency. Dickens probably intends the chain of coincidences that brings Brownlow and the Maylies into Oliver's life to suggest providential intervention, the idea that heaven looks after its own. Kathleen Tillotson, for example, has declared that the function of coincidence in the plot is "designed by Dickens . . . to illustrate the power of the principle of Good."[36] But those chosen to represent that principle come across finally as too weak to operate as credible opponents to the tremendous power with which the forces of evil have been invested. Graham Greene asks, "how can we really believe that these inadequate ghosts of goodness can triumph over Fagin, Monks and Sikes?"[37] That they in fact do, he attributes to the "elaborate machinery of the plot."[38] Arnold Kettle is less distressed by the use of coincidence: "literal probability is not an essential quality of an adequate plot,"[39] but he charges that a sudden shift in Oliver's symbolic function after his collapse in the magistrate's court introduces an element of moral ambiguity into the novel which makes it difficult for us to accept the Brownlow-Maylie world at face value:

> Until he wakes up in Mr. Brownlow's house he is a poor boy struggling against the inhumanity of the state. After he has slept himself into the Brownlow world, he is a young bourgeois who has been done out of his property.[40]

Kettle's point is a very important one. Dickens has attempted to do two things in Oliver Twist. He has tried to arouse compassion for all helpless victims of an oppressive system by symbolizing them in Oliver, and at the same time has decided to assert his faith in the power of good to survive all manner of adversity. One way to achieve this would have been to make Oliver himself defy and defeat the system, but the very qualities which make him such an appealing victim--his youth, his vulnerability, his innocence and total lack of guile--render this impossible. Oliver must therefore be rescued, but the agents chosen for this task are not themselves sufficiently distinguished from the world which tried to crush him in the first place. It is not that Dickens was unaware of the difficulty, or that he did not labour to represent a sharp division between the dark shadows of the slum and the sunny vistas of Pentonville and Chertsey, but although the novel employs elaborate image patterns which set the pure countryside against the corrupt city,[41] the respectable world which Oliver enters is nevertheless protected by the very same apparatus of poor laws and unjust courts that he originally sought to escape. When Brownlow appears in court on Oliver's behalf, one has the sense that his outraged sputterings are occasioned at least as much by his indignation at the magistrate's failure to treat him with the deference due his rank as by any disinterested concern for justice. And the decision (to which Arnold Kettle has drawn attention) to let Monks off while Fagin is condemned to die, smacks more of class solidarity than compassion.

Although most critics lump Brownlow in with the Maylies, Joseph Gold, in an attempt to argue that the Maylies are "the exemplars of integration," distinguishes between them:

> To speak briefly of the Maylies, the exemplars of integration, it is important to note that they act out of what they are rather than out of any code or any submission to appearances. To make this point quite clear Dickens has Rose deny the butler's request that she examine the victim of his shooting. The refusal to look at the wounded Oliver--having the pretext of Rose's feminine frailty, the abhorrence of blood--in fact has the effect of depriving her of any motivation at all. Her directions for the care of Oliver come from the compassion by nature of herself and her guardian, uninfluenced by family likenesses or the innocence of Oliver's appearance, such as influenced Mr. Brownlow. Mr. Brownlow only mistakenly thought he was robbed by Oliver and yet failed to believe in him wholeheartedly . . . As though to make quite clear the contrast between his receivers, Dickens permits Oliver no chance to corroborate his story and the Maylies every chance to doubt him. Brownlow is quite certain he has been duped and trusts neither Oliver nor his own best instincts. The Maylies, however, have not a second's doubt as to Oliver's veracity, or if they have, their own generosity is not one whit affected by it.[42]

I have at least two objections to this interpretation. The first, a relatively minor one, has to do with the contention that the Maylies refuse to act "out of any code or any submission to appearances." Rose's refusal to marry Harry Maylie, in spite of her love for him, "'because of the stain upon my name,'" hardly comes across as a disregard for appearances, a concern that emerges even more strongly in Mrs. Maylie's advice to her son:

> "I think, my dear son . . . that youth has many generous impulses which do not last; and that among them are some, which, being gratified, become only the more fleeting. Above all, I think," said the lady, fixing her eyes on her son's face, "that if an enthusiastic, ardent, ambitious man marry a wife on whose name there is a stain, which, though it originate in no fault of hers, may be visited by cold and sordid people upon her, and upon his children also, and, in exact proportion to his success in the world, be cast in his teeth, and made the subject of sneers against him; he may, no matter how generous and good his nature, one day repent of the connexion he formed in early life. And she may have the pain of knowing that he does so." (_OT_, p. 251)

There runs through these remarks a vein of worldly prudence which is at variance with the notion of the innocent purity of the Maylie world. More important however, is that although Professor Gold may distinguish between the worlds of the Maylies and Mr. Brownlow, within the novel they constitute one realm. At the end of the novel Oliver is Brownlow's adopted son, and although Rose is a frequent companion, Brownlow is his teacher, "filling the mind of his adopted child with stores of knowledge" (*OT*, p. 415). If Oliver is to be incorporated into the world of those "exemplars of integration," what effect must the subversive influence of Brownlow have upon their impact as an example to Oliver?

The moral ambiguity of the Brownlow-Maylie world which Arnold Kettle observed is conveyed most powerfully in the actions of Mr. Brownlow and Harry Maylie in the hunting down of Sikes. When Oliver, suspected of having picked Mr. Brownlow's pocket, is pursued by a howling mob, Dickens speaks accusingly of "a passion *for hunting something* deeply implanted in the human breast" (*OT*, p. 67), and describes the mob's exultation as Oliver's strength flags: "they hail his decreasing strength with still louder shouts and whoop and scream with joy" (*OT*, p. 67). The pursuit of Sikes begins with Dr. Losberne and Mr. Brownlow, having caught the scent, setting out to catch Sikes, "each in a fever of excitement wholly uncontrollable" (*OT*, p. 380). Harry Maylie, in the meantime, has gone out mounted on horseback to meet with a kind of posse gathered on the outskirts of the city. When Sikes is finally cornered in the house on Jacob's Island, the fury of the mob is whipped up into a frenzy by a figure on horseback who, we realize with something of a shock, must be Harry:

> Among them all, none showed such fury as the man on horseback, who, throwing himself out of the saddle, and bursting through the crowd as if he were parting water, cried, beneath the window, in a voice that rose above all others, "Twenty guineas to the man who brings a ladder!" (*OT*, p. 388)

The crowd, predictably, goes wild:

> Some called for ladders, some for sledge-hammers; some ran with torches to and fro as if to seek them, and still came back and roared again; some spent their breath in impotent curses and execration; some pressed forward with the ecstasy of madmen . . . (OT, p. 388)

An old gentleman joins Harry in shouting out offers of reward, with each cry sending the mob into ever greater transports of demonic fury:

> "I will give fifty pounds," cried an old gentleman from the same quarter, "to the man who takes him alive. . . ."
>
> There was another roar. At this moment the word was passed among the crowd that the door was forced at last, and that he who had first called for the ladder had mounted into the room. The stream abruptly turned, as this intelligence ran from mouth to mouth, and the people at the windows, seeing those upon the bridges pouring back, quitted their stations, and running into the street, joined the concourse that now thronged pell-mell to the spot they had left, each man crushing and striving with his neighbour, and all panting with impatience to get near the door, and look upon the criminal as the officers brought him out. The cries and shrieks of those who were pressed almost to suffocation, or trampled down and trodden under foot in the confusion, were dreadful. (OT, p. 390)

The "old gentleman" in this scene is not identified specifically, but there is strong corroborative evidence that he is, in fact, Mr. Brownlow. In the scene just prior to this, he responds to Dr. Losborne's news that the government has just offered a reward of one hundred pounds for the capture of Sikes, with the words:

> "I will give fifty more . . . and proclaim it with my own lips upon the spot, if I can reach it." (OT, p. 380)

Harry and Mr. Brownlow are perhaps meant to be seen as something like avenging angels, agents of divine retribution, but Dickens's stress on their excitement, and the insane violence they incite, makes them appear more like leaders of a lynch mob, and forges some uncomfortable links in the reader's mind with the mob that hunts down Oliver. The fact that Oliver is innocent while Sikes is guilty does not make that much difference. The mob is not moved by a desire for justice, but by the "passion for hunting something," a passion which one suspects Maylie and Brownlow share. It is because of this, I think, that one responds to Fagin's cry, "'What right have they to butcher me?'" with a certain sympathy. No right, not because Fagin is innocent, but because the hands of his judges are no less bloody than his.

I said earlier that there were two ways Dickens could show the principle of good triumphing at last. He could depict Oliver as sufficiently powerful to defeat evil himself, or he could carry him off to some retreat of like souls where he could live unthreatened. Dickens chose to do the latter, and it is unsatisfactory, not only because of the moral difficulties with the Maylie-Brownlow world which I have tried to point out, but because the security which Oliver at last finds begins to look suspiciously like the security of the grave. Dickens, having held up childhood as a moral ideal, cannot let Oliver grow beyond it. The last few pages of the novel rush us over several years, but Oliver is still set before us as if he were a child, not just in innocence, but dependency as well. As Hillis Miller has observed: "he lives happily ever after, but only by living in a perpetual childhood of submission to protection and direction from without."[43] This unnatural prolongation of childhood is really a kind of death. Although Dickens apparently resisted the sentimental[44] impulse that made him kill off Little Nell, in that Oliver is permitted to live, to discover his true identity, to see himself vindicated and his enemies punished, "the principle of Good . . . triumphing at last," the idyllic world into which he is incorporated at the end of the novel is closely linked with the images of the death that Oliver longed for during his periods of greatest misery. Death is depicted as a calm, pastoral world, where one is at peace and surrounded by kind faces. Oliver, after his first miserable day with Sowerberry, "wished, as he crept into his narrow bed, that that were his coffin, and that he could be lain in a calm and lasting sleep in the church-yard ground, with the tall grass waving gently above his head, and the sound of the old deep bell to soothe him in his sleep" (OT, p. 29). Death is a condition not only of peaceful release, but of health and restoration as well. Oliver tries to console Little Dick by telling him he will soon be well and happy, and Dick responds, "'I hope so . . . after I am dead, but not before. I know the doctor must be right, Oliver, because I dream so much of Heaven and Angels, and kind faces that I never see when I am awake'" (OT, p. 49). The realm of the dead is one of happy souls whose state is infinitely superior to that of the living. Oliver falls into a deep sleep after his fever breaks, and Dickens comments, "Who, if this were death, would be roused again to all the struggles and turmoil of life; to all its cares for the present; its anxieties for the future; more than all, its weary recollections of the past" (OT, p. 78). The world of the Maylies is a similar pastoral world, in which Oliver, as in Little Dick's dream, is surrounded by kind faces, and in which there is never any change. Rose Maylie, Oliver's most constant companion in the final pages of the novel, is, we are told by Harry Maylie, "akin" to that distant world (OT, p. 260) beyond the grave. One notes further, how frequently Dickens links death and sleep in this novel. Oliver falling asleep in Fagin's den "look[s] like death, not death as it shows in shroud and coffin, but in the guise it wears when life has just departed; when a young and gentle spirit has, but an instant, fled to Heaven, and the gross world has not had time to breathe upon the changing dust it hallowed" (OT, p. 143). Arnold Kettle has drawn attention to the fact that Oliver sleeps his way into the world of Mr. Brownlow and the Maylies. He falls down in a swoon in the courtroom, to awaken in a kind of heaven in Brownlow's house, where "he was tended with a kindness and solicitude that knew no bounds" (OT, p. 76). His entrance into the Maylie household comes about in a similar fashion. He collapses in a stupor on their doorstep and once again recovers consciousness to find himself in a paradisal world where "Oliver's pillow was smoothed by gentle hands . . . and loveliness and virtue watched over him as he slept" (OT, p. 219).

Death is seen in the novel as not only that which can preserve innocence, but that which apparently possesses the power to restore it once it has been lost:

> It is a common thing for the countenances of the dead, even in that fixed and rigid state, to subside into the long-forgotten expression of sleeping infancy and settle into the very look of early life; so calm, so peaceful, do they grow again, that those who knew them in their happy childhood, kneel by the coffin's side in awe and see the Angel even upon the earth. (OT, p. 172)

The conclusion is inescapable that Oliver's release from the sordid realities of slum and workhouse is really achieved by a kind of death. One notes that the final paragraphs of the novel in which Dickens gives us glimpses of Oliver's life with the Maylies and Mr. Brownlow have a dreamy, misty quality, as of a vision seen from a great distance, and that the note of death is sounded once more in the concluding paragraph:

> Within the altar of the old village church, there stands a white marble tablet, which bears as yet one word, "AGNES!" There is no

> coffin in that tomb; and it may be many, many years, before another is placed above it! But if the spirits of the Dead ever come back to earth, to visit spots hallowed by the love--the love beyond the grave--of those whom they knew in life, I believe that the shade of Agnes sometimes hovers round that solemn nook. (OT, p. 415)

Our last glimpse of Oliver is as the perpetual innocent, safely ensconced in a blissful world in which even the crusty old Grimwig learns to plant gardens, and, as the last paragraph suggests, re-united with the ghost of his dead mother. Oliver, in effect, has died and gone to Heaven.

The Old Curiosity Shop

The theme of innocence preserved through death which so deeply touched Victorian sensibilities, somewhat to the bemusement of modern readers, who tend to view it as a diseased taste, is only hinted at in Oliver Twist, but the direction in which Dickens was moving is suggested by the fate of one of the characters in his next novel, Nicholas Nickleby. Although this novel is primarily concerned with the adventures of an adult hero attempting to make his way in the world, it does contain one child-like innocent, the pathetic Smike. Smike's sufferings are at least as intense as Oliver's, and his happy release comes, not through the intervention of a Mr. Brownlow or a Rose Maylie, but through actual, physical death. Dickens pulls out all the stops:

> The dying boy turned toward him, and putting his arm about his neck, made answer, "I shall soon be there!"
>
> After a short silence he spoke again,
>
> "I am not afraid to die," he said, "I am quite contented. I almost think that if I could rise from this bed quite well I would not wish to do so, now. You have so often told me we shall meet again--so very often lately, and now I feel the truth of that, so strongly--that I can even bear to part from you." (NN, p. 762)

Smike's declaration that he would almost prefer death to "ris[ing] from this bed quite well" is perhaps the element most surprising to modern readers of this speech. The attitude expressed is not resignation in the face of the inevitable, but a kind of sentimental morbidness. This world is completely written off, and all joy and fulfillment looked for in death. All that holds Smike back from completely embracing death is his desire to confess the secret of his unrequited love for Kate. That done, "he murmured, 'I am happy.' He fell into a light slumber, and waking smiled as before; then, spoke of beautiful gardens, which he said stretched out before him, and were filled with figures of men, women, and many children, all with light upon their faces; then, whispered that it was Eden--and so died" (NN, p. 763).

It would be unfair to Dickens, however, not to point out that there is another side to the coin. While few writers could surpass him when it came to milking a child's death-bed scene for every possible tear, he was also capable at times of poking sharp fun at the kind of sentimentality which made his death-beds so popular. In this same novel, Mrs. Kenwigs, having artistically arranged the four little Kenwigses on a small bench in front of the fire, stands back to admire the effect. Suddenly she is overpowered "by the feelings of a mother," and dissolves in tears:

> "I can-not help it, and it don't signify," sobbed Mrs. Kenwigs; "oh! they're too beautiful to live, much too beautiful!" (NN, p. 167)

"On hearing this alarming presentiment of their being doomed to an early death in the flower of their infancy," the four little girls, instead of responding with the wan, sweet smile of the sentimentalized Victorian child, "raised a hideous cry, and burying their heads in their mother's lap simultaneously, screamed until the eight flaxen tails vibrated again" (NN, p. 167).

Although the impulse to mock this response to childhood is very strong in Dickens, and occurs from time to time even within The Old Curiosity Shop, the impulse to indulge himself and his readers in tearful orgies over dying children was at least as strong. The death of Mary Hogarth probably had a great deal to do with the excesses of that novel, but it is important to recall that the death of Little Nell aroused an astonishing response in his readers as well. The cult of death (see Appendix) is one of the more peculiar manifestations of Victorian culture, and before moving on to a specific discussion of The Old Curiosity Shop, I should like to pause briefly to consider that aspect of the cult which has to do with the deaths of children, and to speculate on some of its underlying causes.

Our own culture, although it has abandoned their particular rituals of death, is at one with the Victorians in regarding the death of a child as an event of the most painful significance. It is important to recall, however, that within the history of Western Christendom, this has not always been the case. Philippe Ariès, in Centuries of Childhood, has described the relative unconcern with which a child's death was received even as late as the seventeenth century:

> In Le Caquet de l'accouchée, [1622] we have a neighbour, standing at the bedside of a woman who has just given birth, the mother of five "little brats," and calming her fears with the words, "Before they are old enough to bother you, you will have lost half of them, or perhaps all of them."[45]

Ariès notes "that the people of the Basque country retained for a very long time the custom of burying children that had died without baptism in the house, on the threshold or in the garden . . . much as we today bury a domestic pet, a cat or dog."[46] He argues that a decisive event in the cultural history of European man, one reflected in art, literature and educational theory, was "the discovery of childhood,"[47] the discovery that the child was not only physically, but psychologically and spiritually different from the adult. The most important aspect of this "discovery" has to do with the new stress placed on the "baptismal innocence" of childhood, the notion that the child's soul, being temporally closer to the event which was supposed to wipe out the stain of original sin, was "the dwelling place of Jesus Christ."[48] Children suddenly acquire a new preciousness and their deaths a new significance. Ariès notes that one result of this belief was "the formation of a moral concept which insisted on the weakness of childhood . . . . but which associated its weakness with its innocence, a true reflection of divine purity."[49]

Ariès' book is primarily a sociological treatise devoted to a study of changing theories of education, but it does not require any great imaginative leap to see how the seventeenth-century discovery of the "baptismal innocence" of childhood helped to pave the way for the later romantic notion of the original innocence of the child. It might be argued that Ariès' work, which draws heavily upon French sources for proof of the seventeenth century's discovery of childhood innocence, has no relevance to a discussion which is supposed to be, after all, about English attitudes. A parallel emphasis, however, on the holy innocence of childhood can be observed in some seventeenth-century English literature as well, with Vaughan's "Retreat" and Traherne's Centuries as perhaps the most noteworthy examples.

Peter Coveney's book, Poor Monkey, discusses the use of the romantic image of the child as a literary symbol. Romantic writers prior to the Victorian era, he argues, used the symbol of the innocent child to express the artist's sense of alienation:

> The child could serve as a symbol of the artist's dissatisfaction with the society which was in process of such harsh development about him. In a world given increasingly to utilitarian values and the Machine, the child could become a symbol of Imagination and Sensibility; a symbol of Nature set against the forces abroad in society de-naturing humanity. Through the child could be expressed the artist's awareness of human Innocence against the cumulative pressures of social Experience.[50]

While Coveney credits Dickens with having used the image of the child in this manner (for example, Hard Times, in which the innocent freedom of childhood is set against the harsh and soul-destroying system of Gradgrindery), he finds that all too frequently the figure of the child, especially the sick or dying child, becomes in Dickens an excuse for indulgence in self-pity:

> He has directed towards the child exaggerated emotions of pathos, deriving from his self-pitying attitude to his own experience as a child. By indulging his own emotion, he clearly provided an image of childhood through which his audience could only too easily indulge itself.[51]

The question one can ask is why this particular form of self-indulgence should have had such a strong appeal for Dickens's readers. What was there in the Victorian psyche that apparently derived such morbid satisfaction from the contemplation of dying children? One oft-repeated explanation has to do with the high child-mortality rates of the nineteenth century. According to this theory, many of Dickens's readers relived in the death-bed scenes, particularly those of Little Nell and Paul Dombey, their own painful experiences of bereavement and found a certain consolation in doing so. Dickens himself seemed to have inclined toward this view, when, noting a gentleman who seemed to be more than usually distraught during a reading of the death of Paul

Dombey, he observed, "He was not in mourning, but I supposed him to have lost some child in old time."[52] Lord Jeffrey's heart-broken response to the death of Little Nell is well known and George Ford notes that "forty years before reading The Old Curiosity Shop, [Jeffrey] had been deeply affected by the loss of an infant son."[53]

But Dickens's own self-pity evoking a response in mourning parents hardly seems to go far enough as an explanation. Another theory has it that guilt is the fountain-spring of all the tears. Noting the enormous toll in children's lives exacted by the industrial revolution, Jack Lindsay and others[54] have suggested that a society which created and killed off Oliver Twists in the millions sought to expiate its guilt by pretending to itself that the dead child had entered into a state of bliss which more than compensated for all the wrongs it had suffered here on earth. George Ford, however, is suspicious of the explanation: "it fails to explain why when the cult of the stiff upper lip replaced the cult of the tearful, there was no significant change in the economic conditions which are supposed (according to the theory) to be responsible for the guilt-complex."[55]

I think that a possible explanation lies in Peter Coveney's casual query about "the relation between a severely repressive morality and the satisfactions it sought in such works as East Lynne in the prospect of dying."[56] The Victorians, as Walter Houghton points out, laid great stress on "earnestness." Houghton quotes from a review of Stanley's life of Dr. Arnold as representative of early Victorian attitudes:

> The predominant characteristic of Dr. Arnold's mind, and that for which above all others we honour him, was his earnestness. The idea conveyed by the motto from Schiller, which Carlyle prefixed

> to his "Past and Present"--ernst ist das Leben--seems to have been, in all its magnificent meaning, perpetually present to his thoughts. Life, in his view of it, was no pilgrimage of pleasure, but a scene of toil, of effort, of appointed work--of grand purposes to be striven for--of vast ends to be achieved--of fearful evils to be uprooted or trampled down--of sacred and mighty principles to be asserted and carried out.[57]

The diction of this passage, with its use of worlds like toil, effort, work, striven, achieved, uprooted, trampled, and asserted, argues a fearsomely strenuous code. One recalls also the passages in In Memoriam in which the speaker, although crushed by his grief, steels himself to go on through sheer will power, and the enormous place given to Duty in Carlyle's scheme of things. The Victorians would have been less than human had they not sometimes indulged in fantasies of escape from this relentless round: the image of the dying child, freed from a world of strife to be borne off to a realm of blissful ease, symbolizes this desire for escape, escape from responsibility and duty, escape back to a Blakean paradise of freedom and joy. The adult Victorian, looking back with an uneasy conscience over his inevitable failures and compromises, could regard the child who died as one who had escaped, like Arnold's Scholar Gipsy, "this strange disease of modern life, / With its sick hurry, its divided aims"[58] to find the wholeness that Little Dick anticipated in death.

It is this quality of escapism, or retreat from life, rather than guilt or "grief-therapy" that I find most predominant in The Old Curiosity Shop. The novel centers on death and depicts it in very seductive terms. What one might call "the-half-in-love-with-easeful-death" syndrome is apparent from the very outset. The novel opens with Master Humphrey listening to "that constant pacing to and fro, that never-ending restlessness, that incessant tread of feet wearing the rough stones smooth and glossy," wondering "how the dwellers in narrow ways can bear to hear it," imagining to himself a sick man tossing and turning on his bed, tortured by "the hum and noise being always present to his senses . . . and the stream of life that will not stop," then moving on to contemplate the river as it flows out to sea (an obvious image of death) with a certain sense of relief:

> Then, the crowds forever passing and repassing on the bridge . . . where many stop on fine evenings looking listlessly down upon the water, with some vague idea that by and by it runs between green banks which grow wider and wider until at last it joins the broad vast sea--where some halt to rest from heavy loads, and think, as they look over the parapet, that to smoke and lounge away one's life, and lie sleeping in the sun upon a hot tarpaulin, in a dull, slow, sluggish barge, must be happiness unalloyed--and where some, and a very different class, pause with heavier loads than they, remembering to have heard or read in some old time that drowning was not a hard death, but of all means of suicide, the easiest and best. (OCS, p. 2)

This passage is almost too obvious to require much in the way of comment; the longing of those oppressed with heavy burdens to lie sleeping in the sun, the thoughts of others on the ease of drowning as a means of suicide, and the slow, heavy movement of the prose, particularly in "dull, slow, sluggish barge," all suggest very powerfully "the desire for inertia" that Steven Marcus[59] has identified in the novel.

This note is one that continues to be sounded throughout the work. Nell visits a graveyard (one of her favourite pastimes), and the narrator speaks of "those who lay so still beneath the moss and turf below, and the strife in which they had worn away their lives" (OCS, p. 128). Death is seen, not only as a release from strife, but from change as well. In the same graveyard Nell encounters an old woman, widowed as a girl, who thinks now of her dead young husband "as if he had been her son or grandson" (OCS, p. 130), and who tells Nell, "'Death doesn't change us more than life'" (OCS, p. 129).

The novel particularly focuses on the deaths of children. Nell's slow pilgrimage toward the grave is, of course, at the heart of the novel, but there is also a section devoted to the death of the little scholar beloved by the village schoolmaster, and many references to the graves of children. Those who die young are regarded as lucky to have escaped the burden of life so soon, and so easily. As Nell strays among the graves after the little scholar's death, she contemplates the lot of those "as young and full of hope as she," who had been "stricken down and gathered to their graves" (OCS, p. 194); but the narrator points out that this ought not to give her any cause for grief. Being but a child herself, she "did not perhaps sufficiently consider to what a bright and happy existence those who die young are borne, and how in death they lose the pain of seeing others die around them" (OCS, p. 194). As she dreams that night of the little scholar, she sees him, "not coffined and covered up, but mingling with angels and smiling happily" (OCS, p. 194). In another graveyard she meets a child who lovingly tends the grave of his brother, but who denies that it is a grave:

> The child answered that that was not its name, it was a garden . . . When he had done speaking, he looked at her with a smile, and kneeling down and nestling for a moment with his cheek against the turf, bounded merrily away. (OCS, p. 394)

The child's act of nestling his cheek against the turf, although intended as a gesture of affection toward the dead brother, also has the effect of making us wonder if it is an expression of his eagerness to join his brother in the "garden." When Nell herself finally dies, we are told that "sorrow was dead in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born" (OCS, p. 539), and the old schoolmaster, in an almost comically clumsy echo of Kent's epitaph for Lear, declares:

> "Think what earth is, compared with the World to which her young spirit has winged its early flight; and say, if one deliberate wish expressed in solemn terms above this bed could call her back to life, which of us would utter it." (OCS, p. 539)

At her funeral, the graveside is crowded with decrepit old folk who appear to have been denied the death that would have been a blessing to them:

> Old men were there, whose eyes were dim and senses failing--grandmothers, who might have died ten years ago, and still been old--the deaf, the blind, the lame, the palsied, the living dead in many shapes and forms, to see the closing of this early grave. What was the death it would shut in, to that which still could crawl and creep above it! (OCS, p. 542)

The notion that life, not death, represents the true experience of loss is expressed even more strongly in Dickens's comparison of true childhood with its hideous parody in old age:

> We call this a state of childishness, but it is the same poor hollow mockery of it, that death is of sleep. Where, in the dull eyes of doating men, are the laughing light and life of childhood, the gaiety that has known no check, the frankness that has known no chill, the hope that has never withered, the joys that fade in blossoming. Where in the sharp lineaments of rigid and unsightly death, is the calm beauty of slumber, telling of rest for the waking hours that are past, and gentle hopes and loves for those which are to come. (OCS, p. 93)

The comparison of death with sleep might seem to contradict what I have been saying about the seductive appeal of death in this novel, but one notes that as Dickens describes Nell's death, not only are those who die young preserved from the withered hopes and faded joys of adulthood, they are also saved from "the sharp lineaments of rigid and unsightly death" as well:

> She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life; not one who

> had lived and suffered death. (OCS, p. 539)

The "sharp lineaments of rigid and unsightly death" are not the marks of death, they are the scars of life.

The preoccupation with childhood innocence as a moral ideal shades unmistakably in The Old Curiosity Shop into the elevation of the image of the dying child as a symbol of refuge from responsibility and pain. A kind of moral inversion takes place in which freedom, peace and fulfillment become identified with death, while pain and imprisonment become synonymous with life. This is expressed not only through the figure of Nell, but through the motif of caged birds which runs through the novel. These are emblems of imprisoned souls, longing for the freedom which, the novel implies, can only be found in death. Master Humphrey, in his early morning walks about the city, notes "the little captives, some of whom, shrinking from the hot hands of drunken purchasers, lie drooping on the path already, while others, soddened by close contact, await the time when they shall be watered and freshened up to please more sober company" (OCS, p. 2). The image is repeated as Nell and her grandfather leave London, and is opened out to link the birds with all helpless or imprisoned things:

> Birds in hot rooms, covered up close and dark, felt it was morning, and chafed and grew restless in their little cells; bright-eyed mice crept back to their tiny homes and nestled timidly together; the sleek house-cat, forgetful of her prey, sat winking at the rays of sun starting through keyhole and cranny in the door, and longed for her stealthy run and warm sleek bask outside. The nobler beasts confined in their dens, stood motionless behind their bars, and gazed on fluttering boughs and sunshine peeping through some little window, with eyes in which old forests gleamed--then trod impatiently the track their prisoned feet had worn . . . Men in their dungeons stretched their cramp cold limbs and cursed the stone that no bright sun could warm. (OCS, p. 114)

Nell herself keeps a pet bird, "with a green bough shading his little cage" (OCS, p. 26), which her grandfather links with her in its helplessness:

> " . . . if I should be forced to leave thee, meanwhile, how have I fitted thee for struggles with the world? The poor bird yonder, is as well qualified to encounter it, and be turned adrift upon its mercies . . . " (OCS, p. 27)

The imprisoned bird, pathetic in its weakness, is an emblem not only of Nell, but of all souls longing for the death that will release them from "the struggles with the world," the prison of life. The Garlands, whose household comes as close as any in the novel to approximating the idyllic quality of the Maylie world, also keep birds, but one notes that although the "cages . . . looked as bright as if they were made of gold" (OCS, p. 168), this image, coming on top of all the other references to captive birds, would seem to hint that not even the sunny, flower-filled world of the Garlands can offer an escape as complete as death. Another bird, this time uncaged and suggesting, perhaps, the idea of a freed soul, leads Nell and her grandfather deeper into the forest that is an image of death. The old man is startled by a sudden noise:

> "What noise was that?"
>
> "A bird," said the child, "flying into the wood, and leading the way for us to follow." . . . As they passed onward, parting the boughs that clustered in their way, the serenity which the child had first assumed, stole into her breast in earnest; the old man cast no longer fearful looks behind, but felt at ease and cheerful, for the further they passed into the deep green shade, the more they felt that the tranquil mind of God was there, and shed its peace on them. (OCS, p. 181)

It is perhaps noteworthy that when Nell's death finally does take place, the motif of "the deep green shade" in which one senses the presence of "the tranquil mind of God" is repeated in the strewing of her death-bed with green boughs (OCS, p. 539).

In Pickwick Papers the figure of the child-like Pickwick was used not only to celebrate innocence, but to stand as a kind of moral yardstick by which one could measure the moral bankruptcy of society. Oliver Twist serves a similar function, but the weakness and vulnerability which Dickens stresses in his portrayal makes it more difficult for innocence to triumph without the agency of outside assistance, and at the end of the novel one is left with the impression that the security which Oliver has found is really a form of death. In The Old Curiosity Shop the longing for death, as the only real refuge for innocence, takes over the novel almost completely, and the evil that besets Nell is not so much representative of any particular social system or abuse, as it is of life itself. In Oliver Twist, Fagin as the devil summed up within himself the various instruments through which a corrupt world sought to destroy the innocent: poverty, crime, and exploitation in all its forms. Nell's principal adversary is also a devil, the dwarfish Quilp, but unlike Fagin, he does not embody any particular aspect of any specific system opposing itself to the virtues represented by Nell. There is no question about his demonic identity: Mrs. Nubbles expresses her conviction that "Mr. Quilp did in his own person represent and embody that Evil Power who was so vigorously attacked at Little Bethel" (OCS, p 361). Phiz depicts him in the illustration facing page 165 with his hair sticking out from the sides of his head like little horns. He is called a "little fiend" (OCS, pp. 40, 307), an "evil spirit" (OCS, pp. 103, 173), an "imp" (OCS, p. 25), and described as performing a "demon dance" (OCS, p. 165). In addition, his death takes place on a devil's night so dark that "the dead of the darkest night would have been as noon-day in comparison with the thick cloud which then rested upon the earth" (OCS, p. 509). His corpse is rejected by the river (recalling the old belief much cherished by witch-hunters that pure water rejects the bodies of those who belong to Satan) and cast up on a swamp while the purifying element of fire destroys what was once his lair:

> The sky was red with flame, and the water that bore it [his body] there had been tinged with the sullen light as it flowed along. The place the deserted carcass had left so recently was now a blazing ruin. (OCS, p. 510)

(One notices that the red-tinged water presents for a moment an image of hell's rivers of fire.)

Quilp then is clearly a devil, but in what does his evil consist? Fagin's identification with evil is much easier; he is a thief who corrupts children, an informer who hands men over to death, a kidnapper who conspires to deprive Oliver of his rightful inheritance, and the instigator of Sikes's murder of Nancy. It is difficult, in objective terms, to see what Quilp does to justify all the melodramatic imagery with which he is depicted. He lends money to the old grandfather to support his gambling mania, and when the debt is not repaid, he takes possession of the old curiosity shop; he masterminds the conspiracy against Kit Nubbles and plots unsuccessfully to have Dick Swiveller marry Nell. He abuses his wife, insults his mother-in-law, and says nasty things to practically everybody. Unfriendly acts, to be sure, but hardly crimes of Satanic proportions. He is depicted as a devil, I believe, because in his exuberant vitality and outrageous sexuality he represents life, and in this novel, to re-phrase Dickens slightly, "Death's the friend, not life!"

Quilp's sheer physical energy is probably his most outstanding characteristic. In contrast to the pale and languid Nell, Quilp is, in Edgar Johnson's phrase, "crackling with vitality."[60] He is constantly in motion: hopping up onto the backs of chairs like a monkey, performing wild devil-dances, landing a kick here and a pinch there. His speech is full of blood-curdling and very energetic threats of violence:

> "I'll beat you to a pulp, you dogs . . . I'll bruise you till you're copper-coloured, I'll break your faces till you haven't a profile between you, I will." (OCS, p. 46)

A knock at the door triggers off an astonishingly violent response:

> . . . he drew back the latch very silently and softly, and opening the door all at once, pounced upon the person on the other side, who had at that moment raised the knocker for another application, and at whom the dwarf ran head-first: throwing out his hands and feet together, and biting the air in the fulness of his malice. (OCS, p. 99)

Many critics, of course, have noted this aspect of Quilp and have seen him as embodying a basic life-force in opposition to the "death directed"[61] world of Little Nell. Where I would disagree, however, is with the argument that sometimes follows from this--that to have Nell represent goodness and death, while Quilp stands for both evil and life, involves "contrary tendencies"[62] which fatally damage the unity of the novel. I do not think that to see Quilp as the representative of both evil and life, necessarily involves within the context of this novel any contradiction at all. Throughout the work, as I have tried to show, life is seen as that which scars and destroys, the process whose inevitable end is decay, while death is that which preserves. A good example of this can be seen as Nell and her grandfather leave London. For a few moments the early morning quiet creates within the city something of the tranquillity of death:

> Bright and happy as it was, there was something solemn in the long, deserted streets, from which, like bodies without souls, all

> habitual character and expression had departed, leaving but one dead uniform repose. (OCS, p. 114)

The peace, however, is illusory; "some straggling carts and coaches rumbling by first broke the charm," and in a very short while, the stirring of life within the streets restores them to their usual condition of tumult and misery:

> . . . children scantily fed and clothed, spread over every street, and sprawling in the dust--scolding mothers stamping their slipper-shod feet with noisy threats upon the pavement--shabby fathers, hurrying with dispirited looks to the occupation which brought them "daily bread" and little more--mangling-women, washerwomen, cobblers, tailors, chandlers, driving their trades in parlours and kitchens and backrooms and garrets, and sometimes all of them under the same roof . . . (OCS, p. 115)

An even clearer illustration of the point occurs in the course of Nell's journey to the Black Country. In a passage ironically reminiscent of the river image in Chapter I (OCS, p. 2), Nell travels up the river on a coalman's barge; however, instead of meandering gently between green banks "until at last it joins the broad vast sea," this river gets dirtier and dirtier until at last Nell reaches a blackened industrial city. Disembarking, she and her grandfather "passed through a dirty lane into a crowded street, and stood amid its din and tumult, and in the pouring rain, as strange, bewildered and confused, as if they had lived a thousand years before, and were raised from the dead and placed there by a miracle" (OCS, p. 325). In a parody of resurrection, this world offers "life" that is noise, dirt, pain and confusion, a bitter mockery of the light and peace found in death, and prefigured in Nell's vision after she climbs the tower:

> Oh! the glory of the sudden burst of light; the freshness of the fields and woods, stretching away on every side, and meeting the bright blue sky; the cattle grazing in the pasturage; the smoke, that, coming from among the trees, seemed to rise upward from the green earth; the children yet at their gambols down below--all, everything, so beautiful and happy! It was like passing from

death to life; it was drawing nearer Heaven. (OCS, p. 398)

The demonic Quilp is employed by Dickens to suggest the idea that the energy and vitality of life are essentially destructive in effect. Not only is much of Quilp's activity devoted to smashing things (Steven Marcus calls attention to the fact that he is by trade a ship-breaker),[63] his mere presence seems at times to be capable of creating instant ruins. One notes what happens to the old curiosity shop after it falls into his hands. From being a home sanctified by the presence of Nell, it falls, with really astonishing rapidity, into the kind of decay that one associates with the tumble-down hovels of Jacob's Island:

> The place was entirely deserted, and looked as dusty and dingy as if it had been so for months. A rusty padlock was fastened on the door, ends of discoloured blinds and curtains flapped drearily against the half-opened upper windows, and the crooked holes cut in the closed shutters below, were black with the darkness of the inside. Some of the glass in the window he had so often watched, had been broken in the rough hurry of the morning, and that room looked more deserted and dull than any. A group of idle urchins had taken possession of the doorsteps; some were plying the knocker and listening with delighted dread to the hollow sounds it spread through the dismantled house; others were clustered about the keyhole, watching half in jest and half in earnest for "the ghost," which an hour's gloom . . . had already raised. Standing all alone in the midst of the business and bustle of the street, the house looked a picture of cold desolation. (OCS, p. 107)

Quilp's two favourite retreats, the broken-down summer-house appropriately named "the Wilderness" and Quilp's Wharf, "a dirty little box" set on a piece of waste ground strewn with bits of refuse and old lumber (OCS, p. 41), also indicate his affinity with "change and decay."

Quilp's other outstanding characteristic is his intense sexuality. Although physically repulsive in appearance, he is mysteriously attractive to women, as his wife testifies. When the neighbourhood harpies, egged on by her mother, attempt to console her for her unfortunate marriage, she declares, "'It's all very fine to talk . . . but I know that if I was to die tomorrow, Quilp could marry anybody he pleased--now that he could, I know'" (OCS, p. 32). The assembled ladies scream with indignation, but she insists:

> "I say again that I know--that I'm sure--Quilp has such a way with him when he likes, that the best-looking woman here couldn't refuse him if I was dead, and she was free, and he chose to make love to her." (OCS, p. 32)

And when Quilp deserts her to take up permanent residence in his "Batchelor's Hall," in spite of her bruises, her terror, and his express command to stay away, she is drawn to the Wharf to plead with him to come home (OCS, p. 377). Michael Steig, recalling Quilp's leering suggestion to Little Nell that she might like to be the second Mrs. Quilp, and the scene in which he commandeers her bed and defiles it with cigar smoke, has suggested that Nell's terrified flight is motivated by her fear of Quilp's sexual aggressiveness. This explanation, he says, results in our perceiving within the novel, "a consistent, psychologically credible, and richly detailed action that goes far toward redeeming the novel from the customary charges of disunity and evasiveness."[64] Steig's arguments, based on a psychoanalytic reading of the novel, are very carefully thought out, but I think it unnecessary to interpret Nell's headlong rush to death as her response to one peculiarly nasty expression of sexuality. Within the framework of the novel, or at least of those portions of it having to do with Nell, sexuality is represented as Quilpish and repulsive because it is intimately bound up with life, and it is life that Nell flees. Sex and physical existence are equally regarded as something to be feared and rejected, and Quilp is a devil because he symbolizes both.

The liberal use of religious language and imagery in the novel inclines one to believe that Dickens (and probably most of his readers as well) thought that in Little Nell he was giving dramatic expression to the Christian belief that this is a fallen world, and that through physical death the Christian enters into new spiritual life. But the repeated stress on the desirability of death as an escape from the burdens of physical existence pushes the belief into the realm of mere sentimentality,[65] and Dickens into a morbid denial of life. So much stress is placed upon Nell's spirituality that one can hardly conceive of her as having a body at all. Even fairly basic details like her size and age remain obscure. Master Humphrey speaks of her in the first chapter in terms which suggest a very young child of about seven or eight; later, from conversations between her brother and Dick Swiveller, we gather that she is around fourteen. Nell recalls Marvell's drop of dew, "trembling lest it grow impure," and longing to be drawn back "to the clear region whence 'twas born."[66] Every day that Nell's soul must remain imprisoned in flesh is a prolonging of her pain, and one finds oneself thinking that the greatest kindness any one could have done the child would have been to smother her at birth.

But there is more to The Old Curiosity Shop than Little Nell. I have already noted in Nicholas Nickleby a certain ambiguity in Dickens's attitude toward sentimental responses to childhood and death. In his description of the death of Smike he seeks to exploit the same attitudes which he had earlier made fun of in Mrs. Kenwigs. Dickens's portrait of the unfolding relationship between Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness goes far toward rejecting the moral values symbolized in

Nell's pursuit of death. The Marchioness, like Nell, is caught up in a physical existence that has more in common with death than life. The illegitimate child of Quilp and Sally Brass (according to a deleted portion of the galley sheets), she has spent most of her life in a damp, underground kitchen that recalls both dungeon and grave:

> It was a very dark miserable place, very low and very damp: the walls disfigured by a thousand rents and blotches. (OCS, p. 272)

She achieves release, however, not through turning her back on the material world to be wafted up to heaven in the arms of angels, but through the establishment of a warm and loving relationship with another human being. Dick Swiveller initiates the process of the Marchioness's resurrection in that he takes notice of her, feeds her, gives her a name and teaches her to play--in other words, provides her with a human identity--but she is responsible for its completion. Her ultimate release from a living death as Sally's slave and prisoner comes when she takes matters into her own hands and runs away. One notes the contrast between Nell's passive drifting off to final sleep and the energy and decisiveness with which the Marchioness acts. They also differ in their ability to form strong human bonds; although most of the characters in the novel testify to their devoted love for Nell, there is about her a deep reserve which tends to keep others at arm's length. The only relationship in which one perceives a strong sense of commitment on Nell's part is with her grandfather, but this is forced upon her by circumstance and is another of the burdens wearing away her life. She is too other-worldly a being to become very much involved with humanity, and the emotion that she arouses in others is largely one of awe and reverence. Short worries about Nell "'getting among people that she's no more fit for, than they are to get among angels for their ordinary chums'" (OCS, p. 139). The Marchioness runs away, not for her own sake, but because she has heard that Dick has fallen ill and has no one to care for him. She has no notion that she has done anything particularly heroic, describing the event in very simple, matter-of-fact terms:

> ". . . the lady whose house you lodged at [said] . . . that you was took very bad, and wouldn't nobody come and take care of you. Mr. Brass, he says, 'It's no business of mine,' he says; and Miss Sally, she says, 'He's a funny chap, but it's no business of mine,' and the lady went away and slammed the door to, when she went out, I can tell you. So I run away that night, and come here, and told 'em you was my brother, and they believed me, and I've been here ever since." (OCS, p. 478)

Nevertheless, her act is one of sacrifice and it has the effect of releasing her from a world of death into a world of life. She eventually marries Dick, having achieved redemption with the material world, not, as Nell does, beyond it. If the figure of Nell is a denial of life, that of the Marchioness is an affirmation.

Dick Swiveller undergoes a similar regeneration. When he first appears in the novel, he is depicted as a grubby dandy with no particular commitment to anyone or anything. He participates half-heartedly in Quilp's plot against Nell, and goes to work for the Brasses at Quilp's instigation, but, while recognizing that such an entanglement could be dangerous, he does not seem to care very much:

> "So I'm Brass's clerk, am I?" said Dick. "Brass's clerk, eh? And the clerk of Brass's sister--clerk to a female Dragon. Very good, very good! What shall I be next? Shall I be a convict in a felt hat and a grey suit, trotting about a dockyard with my number neatly embroidered on my uniform, and the order of the garter on my leg, restrained from chafing my ankle by a twisted belcher handkerchief? Shall I be that? Will that do, or is it too genteel? Whatever you please, have it your own way, of course." (OCS, p. 253)

Shortly after he has begun to concern himself with the Marchioness, he contracts a fever, and in his delirium seems to wander in a desert, parched with thirst and tormented with devils:

> Tossing to and fro upon his hot, uneasy bed; tormented by a fierce thirst which nothing could appease; unable to find, in any change of posture, a moment's peace or ease, and rambling, ever, through deserts of thought where there was no resting-place, no sight or sound suggestive of refreshment or repose, nothing but a dull eternal weariness, with no change but the restless shiftings of his miserable body, and the weary wandering of his mind, constant still to one ever-present anxiety . . . darkening every vision like an evil conscience, and making slumber horrible--in these slow tortures of his dread disease, the unfortunate Richard lay wasting and consuming inch by inch, until, at last, when he seemed to fight and struggle to rise up, and to be held down by devils, he sank into a deep sleep, and dreamed no more. (OCS, p. 474)

This passage is worth quoting because it repeats some of the principal images Dickens has used to describe life in the Little Nell portions of the novel. Dick is stricken with a "dread disease," characterized by "weary wandering" and "restless shifting," "unable to find . . . a moment's peace or ease." Devils labour to hold him down, while he struggles to rise up; the references to the desert and his "hot, uneasy bed" bring to mind Nell's bed of ashes in the Black Country, Dickens's version of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Dick is delivered from this desert of death to awaken in a paradisal garden, but the garden is in the here and now, and the only angel in sight is the Marchioness:

> [He] unconsciously fell, in a luxury of repose, to staring at some green stripes on the bed-furniture, and associating them strangely with patches of fresh turf, while the yellow ground between them made gravel walks, and so helped out a long perspective of trim garden.
>
> He was rambling in imagination on these terraces, and had quite lost himself among them indeed, when he heard the cough once more. The walks shrunk into stripes again at the sound, and raising himself a little in the bed, and holding the curtain open with one hand, he looked out.
>
> The same room certainly, and still by candlelight; but with what unbounded astonishment did he see all those bottles, and basins, and articles of linen airing by the fire . . . The atmosphere, too, filled with a cool smell of herbs and vinegar; the floor newly sprinkled; the--the what? The Marchioness? (OCS, p. 475)

Dick and the Marchioness, although their adventures take up a relatively insignificant part of the novel, represent a rejection of the death wish upon which the bulk of the work is based.

In both *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* one can see elements of the self-pity which Peter Coveney speaks of: in *Oliver* it emerges primarily in the author's insistence on the pathetic helplessness of Oliver and the demonic strength of the powers pitted against him; in *The Old Curiosity Shop* one perceives it in the figure of the child-victim retreating from a harsh and unfeeling world into death, but in the countervailing figures of Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness one can perhaps see Dickens coming to the realization that his preoccupation with the trials of innocence had reached an artistic dead end. In *Barnaby Rudge* he begins to move out in new directions, directions initially suggested to him, I would submit, by the possibilities he sensed in Dick and the Marchioness.

Barnaby Rudge

The title-figure of *Barnaby Rudge* is a feeble-minded young man whose childhood is "complete and lasting" (*BR*, p. 190); early in the novel Gabriel Varden describes him as "a jewel [who] comes and goes with ease where we who think ourselves much wiser would make but a poor hand of it" (*BR*, p. 42). His child-like imagination enables him to live in a world full of mysterious life and movement, a world which makes ordinary reality seem dull and dead by comparison:

> "Why, how much better to be silly, than as wise as you! You don't see shadowy people there, like those that live in sleep--not you. Nor eyes in the knotted panes of glass, nor swift ghosts when it blows hard, nor do you hear voices in the air, nor see men stalking in the sky--not you! I lead a merrier life than you, with

> all your cleverness. You're the dull men. We're the bright ones. Ha! ha! I'll not change with you, clever as you are,--not I!" (BR, p. 82)

This evidence would suggest that Dickens, at least initially, had some notion of structuring the novel around yet another child-like innocent, this time, as Gabriel Varden's speech suggests, with some element of the traditional holy fool,[67] whose "foolishness" is seen to cut through the conventional wisdom of society with penetrating insight. Presenting Barnaby as locked into perpetual childhood by his mental condition also solves the problem of how to preserve innocence without killing the child before he reaches adulthood. But while Dickens may have begun the novel with some such end in view, he does not follow it up. Although Barnaby figures in much of the action, he is not a central figure in the sense that Nell and Oliver are. Edgar Johnson, in fact, describing Barnaby Rudge as "the least effective of all Dickens's full-length works," claims that "the feeble-witted Barnaby, its central character, has no organic connection" with its "clumsy and broken-backed plot."[68] Even Harold F. Folland, who thinks the work "both richer and more firmly and meaningfully organized than many critics have allowed,"[69] is hard put to account for Barnaby's significance as anything more than a peripheral character. Although Dickens never entirely lost his fascination with the image of persecuted innocence, his interest in it grew much less after The Old Curiosity Shop. In Barnaby Rudge he moves on to other issues, depriving Barnaby of the position of central importance enjoyed by the earlier innocent heroes and heroines. In addition, I would suggest that in this novel innocence is viewed in a significantly different light than in the earlier works. The innocence of Oliver and Nell (this applies particularly to Oliver) is basically a romantic quality, an innate moral sense or intuitive ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Barnaby's "innocence," on the other hand, more closely approximates modern notions on the subject (see, for example, Richard Hughes' High Wind in Jamaica) in that he is depicted as being innocent of the difference between good and evil. As Steven Marcus has noted, Barnaby is "capable of behaviour whose consequences are indistinguishable from those which proceed from calculated wickedness."[70] His "darkened intellect" deprives him of the opportunity to make rational decisions and leaves him an easy prey for the sinister manipulations of Stagg. As a result, he becomes a standard-bearer in the Gordon Riots, and even stands guard, with naive pride, while Hugh and Dennis "lay wallowing, like some obscene animals, in their squalor and wickedness" (BR, p. 398).

In the novels prior to Barnaby Rudge, Dickens tended to depict moral conflicts in relatively simple terms: the pure innocent is pitted against the demonic villain and the "good" characters reject evil because their innocent natures preclude any other possibility. It is impossible for Oliver to participate in the robbery in Chertsey, impossible for Fagin to corrupt him. In Barnaby Rudge, however, moral issues are viewed in a more complex light. The instinct for virtue is not enough in itself, it must be allied with knowledge and judgement. In the more complicated world of Barnaby Rudge, the innocent is at a disadvantage because he lacks the experience to make sound moral judgements. Mrs. Rudge is terrified of the rioters; she immediately recognizes their potential brutality and violence, but her innocent son is so caught up in a child-like excitement at the spectacle of marching men, banners and badges, that he resists her entreaties and scampers off to join them. The novel pairs Barnaby with Lord George Gordon, the ostensible leader of the riots. Lord George is of course not technically an innocent, but his state parallels Barnaby's in that he is basically a good man, as his final days in prison testify:

> He had his mourners. The prisoners bemoaned his loss, and missed him; for though his means were not large, his charity was great, and in bestowing alms among them he considered the necessities of all alike, and knew no distinction of sect or creed. (BR, p.627)

He is also, however, a madman, "a poor crazy lord" whose anti-popery mania, whipped up and manipulated by the sinister Gashford, is responsible for turning London into a microcosm of hell.

Barnaby and Lord George are the only literally mad men in the novel (if one exempts the collective being of the mob), but there are many other examples of characters whose impulses are not inherently wicked, but who nevertheless find themselves implicated in criminal acts because of their incapacity for moral judgement. Of these, Hugh is one of the most interesting. Although not an innocent in the sense that Barnaby is, he is depicted as a kind of noble savage. Thomas J. Rice argues that Barnaby Rudge "is an act of political atonement for Oliver Twist," and that Hugh is meant to be seen as "innately depraved," and thus counter to the "innately good" Oliver.[71] The use of the term depravity, however, in connection with Hugh is incorrect because the word signifies the corruption of something once good. Hugh is not a fallen being, he is simply morally undeveloped, a primitive man who functions almost entirely on an instinctual level. More animal than man (Sir John Chester calls him "the Centaur," and John Willet remarks, "'that chap that can't read nor write, and has never had much to do with anything but the animals, and has never lived in any way but like the animals he has lived among, is an animal'" [BR, p.87]), he has never learned restraint or discipline. Dolly Varden attracts him sexually, so he attempts to rape her. He revels in the manic violence of the mob, and mounted on horseback, a true centaur, rallies the rioters. Dickens's description of Hugh does not so much stress depravity as a magnificent animality:

> The light that fell upon this slumbering form, showed it in all its muscular and handsome proportions. It was that of a young man, of a hale athletic figure, and a giant's strength, whose sunburnt face and swarthy throat, overgrown with jet black hair, might have served a painter for a model. (BR, p. 86)

Full of a furious energy which brooks no restraints, he hurls himself into the assaults on Parliament, Newgate and the Maypole, but at the same time, he recoils from the bland savagery of Dennis and saves both John Willet and Gabriel Varden from being hanged. Dickens's portrayal of him is basically sympathetic. Hugh's readiness to participate in events which threaten the fabric of society is accounted for by his having spent most of his life as a virtual outcast: a point which is expressed symbolically through the revelation that he is the unacknowledged son of Sir John Chester, M.P. Society has done nothing to make him feel he is a part of it and his values are those of the stable in which he lives. Like an animal (and unlike his highly-civilized father), he is capable of both affection and loyalty, but his inability to function rationally leads him to make disastrous choices, a characteristic he shares with Barnaby and Gordon.

This novel, unlike anything Dickens had written previously, places great emphasis on the complexity of moral choices. The fact that it contains virtually no portraits of children is of some significance; it represents a turning away from the world of childhood to concentrate on issues having to do with adult conduct in an adult world. While it is true that childish innocence never entirely lost its attractiveness for Dickens, Barnaby Rudge makes no attempt to hold it up as a moral ideal. The instincts of innocence may be sufficient for the moral guidance of an Oliver or a Nell, but in the more complex world of Barnaby Rudge action must be informed by knowledge. The figures of Barnaby, Gordon and Hugh show how inadequate mere instinct, or even a strong desire to act in a manner beneficial to society (Gordon thinks he has been called upon to act as prophet and saviour) can be when it is uninstructed by wisdom or experience.

Pickwick's unselfconscious spontaneity was one of his most charming characteristics; while Dickens is consistent in regarding a talent for cold-blooded calculation as a mark of heartlessness, (for example, Sir John), in Barnaby Rudge he places an unusual emphasis on the need to place curbs on impulse and instinct. It is true that he describes with obvious gusto the smashing and burning of those institutions whose functions are to govern and restrain, but at the same time, there is a profound horror of the anarchy that this unleashes, and a compensating glorification of the discipline and order of the army as it moves in to take control. When the soldiers take Barnaby prisoner, "they advanced steadily; neither quickening their pace as they came nearer, nor raising any cry, nor showing the least emotion or anxiety. Though this was a matter of course in the case of regular troops, even to Barnaby, there was something particularly impressive and disconcerting in it to one accustomed to the noise and tumult of an undisciplined mob" (BR, p. 439). The mob, by contrast, is incapable of achieving anything but destruction; even the performance of a simple task like obtaining water for injured men lies beyond it:

> Those who fell down in fainting fits, and were not crushed or burnt, were carried to an inn-yard close at hand, and dashed with water from a pump; of which buckets full were passed from man to man among the crowd; but such was the strong desire of all to drink, and such the fighting to be first, that, for the most part, the whole contents were spilled upon the ground, without the lips of one man being moistened. (BR, p. 493)

Discipline, both self-imposed and external, is an important aspect of the theme of the novel. It is in this connection that the character of Gabriel Varden is most important. His occupation--locksmith--is thematically significant. A passage picturing him at his work makes obvious connections through the imagery between the restraints symbolized by the making of locks, and harmony and freedom:

> Who but a locksmith could have made such music! A gleam of sun shining through the unsashed window, and chequering the dark workshop with a broad patch of light, fell full upon him, as though attracted by his sunny heart. There he stood, working at his anvil, his face all radiant with exercise and gladness, his sleeves turned up, his wig pushed off his shining forehead--the easiest, freest, happiest man in all the world. (BR, p. 307)

His calm refusal, in the face of threats against his life, to unlock the prison gates is similarly related to the theme of the importance of restraint and limit.

The problem that the novel confronts is the balancing of discipline and freedom, not only on an individual, but on a societal level. It is interesting to note in this connection that the same condition which makes Barnaby a perpetual innocent also keeps him in a state of perpetual dependency. His mother thanks God for it:

> "O Thou," she cried, "who has taught me such deep love for this one remnant of the promise of a happy life, out of whose affliction even perhaps the comfort springs that he is ever a relying, loving child to me--never growing old or cold at heart, but needing my care and duty in his manly strength as in his cradle-time." (BR, p. 137)

But it means that Barnaby can never experience true freedom. He must spend his whole life under the care and tutelage of others. When Dickens implied a similar fate for Oliver, it was put forward as a desirable state of affairs, but within the context of this novel, Barnaby's inability to achieve independent status makes him a pitiable figure. It also helps to illuminate the connection between responsibility and freedom which the novel sets out to explore.

The division of the novel into murder mystery and love story on the one hand, and historical novel on the other, has been much criticized for discontinuity. Although there have been critics[72] from time to time who have attempted to show the organic relationship of one half of the novel to the other, the generally accepted view is that the work, in spite of some magnificent writing in the riot scenes, is a failure which Dickens instinctively avoided for years, and only tackled when he could no longer wriggle out of his legal commitment.[73] Forster's comments are still accepted as substantially accurate:

> The interest with which the tale begins, has ceased to be its interest before the close; and what has chiefly taken the reader's fancy at the outset, almost wholly disappears in the power and passion with which, in the later chapter, the great riots are described.[74]

I believe, however, that the early chapters are related to the later as microcosm to macrocosm and that the theme is illustrated on the personal level among the characters of the Maypole world, and on a larger scale with the riots. The significantly named Maypole Inn, as A. E. Dyson has suggested,[75] with its ancient carving, ceilings "blackened by the hand of time" (BR, p. 2), looking "as if it were asleep" (BR, p. 2), is a symbol of England itself, the old "Merrie England" of popular myth which Dickens rejects when he has Dennis speak approvingly of "the good old days" (BR, p. 284), and when he describes "the fine old English gentleman" (BR, p. 357) who abuses Barnaby and his mother. The Inn is presided over by John Willet, a fat, stupid tyrant, who in his "high mightiness and majesty" (BR, p. 228), inevitably recalls George III,[76] England's king at the time of the riots. He has a son, "a broad-shouldered strapping young fellow of twenty, whom it pleased his father still to consider a little boy, and to treat accordingly" (BR, p. 6). The more Joe submits, the more relentlessly his father oppresses. Dickens describes the process in political and military terminology which helps suggest the larger pattern of a whole oppressed people:

> Old John having long encroached a good standard inch, full measure on the liberty of Joe, and having snipped off a Flemish ell in the matter of the parole, grew so despotic and so great, that his thirst for conquest knew no bounds. The more young Joe submitted, the more absolute old John became. The ell soon faded into nothing. Yards, furlongs, miles arose; and on went old John in the pleasantest manner possible, trimming off an exuberance in this place, shearing away some liberty of speech or action in that, and conducting himself in his small way with as much mightiness and majesty, as the most glorious tyrant that ever had his statue reared in the public way, of ancient or of modern times. (BR, p. 228)

Joe is finally driven to violent rebellion, and after striking his father's crony, Solomon Daisy, runs off to join the army. This miniature rebellion at the Maypole prefigures the larger insurrection which convulses the kingdom, an insurrection in which the Maypole is destroyed and in which old Willet's stupefaction and indecision in the face of the mob is paralleled by the paralysis of the London authorities confronted by a similar rejection of their authority.

Two other young men in the novel also chafe under the authority of their elders. Edward Chester, whose father wants to keep him in a state of dandified indolence so that he can marry an heiress, complains bitterly:

> "I cannot bear this absolute dependence, Sir, even upon you. Time has been lost, and opportunity thrown away, but I am yet a young man and may retrieve it. Will you give me the means of devoting such abilities and energies as I possess, to some worthy pursuit? Will you let me try to make for myself an honourable path in life?" (BR, p. 117)

Edward, like Joe, feels stifled and oppressed by the dependence forced upon him by his domineering father. The state that Barnaby must accept because he has no other choice, is one that drives them into rebellion. What Joe and Edward both long for is not, however, merely freedom, but freedom and responsibility. Sim Tappertit, on the other hand, who feels himself to be unjustly held down in his apprenticeship to Gabriel Varden, confuses liberty with license. He paints a glowing picture of the freedom his apprentice-ancestors once enjoyed:

> the 'prentices had, in times gone by, had frequent holidays of right, broken people's heads by scores, defied their masters, nay, even achieved some glorious murders in the streets, which privileges had gradually been wrested from them. (BR, p. 65)

Edward and Joe rebel in order to assume responsible adult roles; Joe becomes a soldier (significantly, fighting against the American revolutionaries), and Edward, somewhat improbably, a successful businessman in the West Indies, but Sim, who thinks "'a corsair or a pirate, a brigand, gen-teel highwayman or patriot . . . [are] the same thing'" (BR, p. 67), runs off to join the rioters.

The riots, which take up such a large portion of the book, are prefigured in the fierce storm that rages around the Maypole some months prior to the outbreak of the disturbances. Old structures are shaken and destroyed by the blast:

> Sign-boards, shaken past endurance in their creaking frames, fell crashing to the pavement; old tottering chimneys reeled and staggered in the blast, and many a steeple rocked again that night,

> as though the earth were troubled. (BR, p. 247)

The response to the storm is even more prophetic:

> guests crowded around the fire, forgot to be political and told each other with a secret gladness that the blast grew fiercer every minute. (BR, p. 247)

The people of England are in the same plight as Edward and Joe. The novel depicts a society held down by harsh, repressive laws (the appalling case of Mary Jones is one example) which breed resentment and hate, a society whose real needs are ignored by rulers who have become slothful and neglectful of their responsibilities (Sir John Chester's becoming an MP exemplifies this point). The accumulated frustration and anger caused by this state of affairs builds up a vast reservoir of rage which Gordon and Gashford are able to tap. The rioters, like Sim, but unlike Edward and Joe, can only express their discontent in irrational violence. Dickens sympathizes with the victims of bad law, timid and indecisive rulers, but he holds no brief for violent revolution. In the insane violence of the riots, men lose their individuality, their rationality, and ultimately, their humanity as they submerge themselves in the mob to become part of "a mad monster" that "rages and roars unceasingly." The people who are swept up into what is ostensibly a religious protest have no clear idea of the issues:

> "No Popery, brother!" cried the hangman.
> "No Property, brother!" responded Hugh.
> "Popery, Popery," said the secretary with his usual mildness.
> "It's all the same," cried Dennis. "It's all right. Down with him, Muster Gashford. Down with everybody, down with everything! Hurrah for the Protestant religion!" (BR, p. 288)

Ultimately violent protest is shown to be self-defeating, as the rioters, "the wretched victims of a senseless outcry, became themselves the dust and ashes of the flames they had kindled, and strewed the public streets of London" (BR, p. 526)

The parallels between the public and private worlds of the novel are intended by Dickens to make a political statement about the nature of protest and the response to authority. Joe and Edward ultimately succeed in their rebellion because they have chosen a responsible way of breaking free and establishing their right to self-determination. Joe earns the right to succeed his father as landlord of the Maypole, and restores it (it was sacked by the rioters) to even greater splendour than before. Edward, who has succeeded in making for himself "an honourable path in life," is rewarded with the hand of the beautiful Emma. Sim Tappertit, on the other hand, who has cast his lot in with the rioters, and who had no clear idea of what he wanted to achieve, other than smashing things and oppressing others as he felt he had been oppressed, ends up as a legless boot-black with a domineering wife. The riots, which as a form of protest lacked clear aim or responsible leadership, ultimately achieve nothing. They are put down and a few of the rioters hanged (generally the weakest and most inoffensive), while the ring-leaders, Gordon and Gashford, get off scot-free. No Joe Willet succeeds the fat, stupid tyrant on England's throne, and the state goes on as before.

Barnaby Rudge represents an important departure from the pattern of Dickens's earlier novels. These tend to focus on a single figure inhabiting a private world of innocence who requires, because of his child-like qualities, protectors or guardians in one form or another (Sam, Brownlow, the Maylies, heaven). This novel depicts the struggles of adult figures attempting to achieve independence within responsible limits and within the context of society. Of more importance still is

Dickens's portrayal of the mob as devils and madmen with its underlying implication that this is what men become once they have agreed to throw off the normal restraints of civilized society. The earlier novels employed devil figures to represent evil as an external force. Although the mob in *Barnaby* is manipulated and directed from without, there is a strong suggestion that primitive, irrational and essentially demonic power is already present within men, waiting to be unleashed by those who know how. But although this theme is present in the novel and reinforced by the symbolism of the locksmith, Dickens betrays a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, he seems to be saying that man in society is inherently wicked, full of original sin which can only be held in check by the vigorous application of well-framed laws. On the other hand, when he comes to treat of individual cases, he still clings tenaciously to the notion that basically good men are tricked into evil acts by *diaboli ex machina* whose origins and motives, like those of Fagin and Quilp, remain obscure. This ambivalence is reflected in the scheme of the novel, which employs two separate devil figures, one for the private, and one for the public world. The public devil, Gashford, whom I shall be discussing in more detail later, operates chiefly by inciting men to act upon demonic impulses already present within their own breasts. The main function of Sir John Chester, however, the devil of the private world, is not so much to unleash latent wickedness within the people he encounters, as it is to twist and distort the truth so that basically decent people with good intentions find themselves caught up in his wicked designs without knowing quite how it came about. As he moves through the world, "honest men who by instinct knew him better, bowed down before him nevertheless, deferred to his every word, and courted his favourable notice . . . people who really had good in them, went with the stream, and fawned and flattered, . . . and had not the courage to resist" (BR, p. 183).

Chester is a portrait of the devil as gentleman. Based to some extent on Lord Chesterfield, whose letters he praises extravagantly, he is a model of graceful indolence and urbane wit. His face is a smooth mask of placid benevolence which no harsh or violent emotion is ever permitted to mar. That he is a devil is clearly recognized by Mr. Haredale who accuses him of having "'the head and heart of an evil spirit in all matters of deception'" (BR, p. 94), and who curses the agreement entered into with Chester as "'a compact . . . made in an evil hour'" (BR, p. 226). In his portraits of Fagin and Quilp Dickens made great play with imagery of smoke and fire to convey their hellish origins, but his method in this novel is more subtle. Aside from one passage in which he fastidiously pushes faggots into the fire with the toe of his boot (BR, p. 94), Chester's demonic identity is suggested less through the use of conventional stage-props than the memory of Milton's Belial which his portrait evokes. Like Belial, Chester seems "graceful and humane . . . for dignity composed and high exploit."[77] An even stronger parallel lies in his ability to make his tongue "drop manna, and make the worse appear / The better reason."[78] Dolly Varden, although uneasy in his presence because of his furtive leers (one recalls Milton's association of Belial with sexual crimes), "could not help owning within herself that he was the sweetest-spoken gentleman that she had ever seen" (BR, p. 207), while her mamma is so taken with "her insinuating visitor," that "she entered into a secret treaty of alliance, offensive and defensive with [him] and really did believe, as many others would have done who saw and heard him, that in so doing she furthered the ends of truth, justice, and morality, in a very uncommon degree" (BR, p. 211). One might argue that Dolly and Mrs. Varden are hardly examples of shining virtue led astray by demonic lies. Dolly is a vain little coquette whose conduct and attitudes suggest some parallels with Chester (both are fond of admiring themselves in the mirror, and Dolly's heartlessness can be linked with Chester's airy dismissal of the heart as "'the centre of the blood vessels and all that sort of thing'" [BR, p. 243]). Her mother is another of Dickens's long line of terrible-tongued shrews. But both Dolly and her mother reject evil once they clearly perceive it. Dolly weeps repentent tears over her treatment of Joe, and Mrs. Varden finally dismisses Miggs. They sin more through ignorance than deliberate intent. The power of Chester's tongue is perhaps seen most strikingly in its effect on Emma Haredale. She is one of those pale paragons of female virtue whom Dickens so admired, but even she is no match for Chester. As he weaves a skilful tissue of half-truths and distortions about Edward's intentions concerning her, she tries to defend her lover, and to reject his father's accusations, but Chester disarms her with the ingenuous delivery of a letter from Edward:

> There appeared something so very candid, so scrupulously honourable, so very truthful and just in this course--something which rendered the upright person who resorted to it so worthy of belief--that Emma's heart for the first time, sank within her. She turned away and burst into tears. (BR, p. 224)

It is partly through Chester's link with Gashford that the public and private worlds of the novel are brought together. Gashford and Chester are old schoolmates, educated together in France. (Apparently, in Dickens's eyes, a nursery of devils. One recalls Blandois/Rigaud of Little Dorrit and the infamous Mademoiselle Hortense of Bleak House.) Although Chester usually functions as devil for the private world and Gashford for the public, each one is allowed to penetrate the domain of the other to some extent. Gashford arranges for the abduction of Emma Haredale, while Chester is responsible for sending the mob out beyond London to destroy the Maypole and the Warren. They resemble each other in their silkiness of tone and smoothness of manner, but if Chester has at least some shadow of a human motive for what he does in his bitter hatred of Haredale, Gashford has none. While Chester remembles Milton's Belial, Gashford is like the Satan of Paradise Lost, burning with the desire to uncreate, to reduce order to its primeval chaos and "once more / Erect the standard there of ancient night."[79] Gashford uses the riots to turn London into hell on earth:

> a vision of coarse faces, with here and there a blot of flaring, smoky light; a dream of demon heads and savage eyes, and sticks and iron bars uplifted in the air, and whirled about; a bewildering horror, in which so much was seen, and yet so little, which seemed so long, and yet so short, in which there were so many phantoms, not to be forgotten all through life, and yet so many things which could not be observed in one distracted glimpse. (BR, p. 386)

The anti-popery cry is only an excuse; what Gashford really desires is the confusion and violence attendant on the riots. As he watches the demonic outpouring which he himself has set in motion, he comments complacently, "'Well! I think this looks a little more like business'" (BR, p. 386). He has a face which "might have furnished a study for the devil's picture" (BR, p. 337); and when Mrs. Rudge implores him to leave Barnaby alone, like the devil quoting scripture, he replies:

> "My good woman . . . how can you! Dear me!--What do you mean by tempting, and by danger? Do you think his lordship is a roaring lion, going about and seeking whom he may devour?" (BR, p. 366)

The reference is to the First Epistle of Peter (5:8) which warns its readers, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour" and Gashford's use of it constitutes a sly mockery of Mrs. Rudge, because the devil she fears is standing in front of her. Like Satan with his fallen angels, he promises his followers liberty, denying that he directs them. When Dennis frets, "'I hope it isn't time we was busy, Muster Gashford,'" the secretary replies, "'Nay . . . who should know that as well as you? How can *I* tell you, Dennis? You are perfect master of your own actions, you know, and accountable to nobody'" a response which leaves Dennis understandably "very much baffled" (*BR*, p. 404), since Gashford has been able to direct the mob like a symphony conductor with a well-trained orchestra, as the scenes describing the mob's assembly before Parliament reveal:

> Upon one of these little staircases . . . Gashford stood with his elbow on the bannister, and his cheek resting on his hand, with his usual crafty aspect. Whenever he varied this attitude in the slightest degree--so much as by the gentlest motion of his arm--the uproar was certain to increase, not merely there, but in the lobby below; from which place no doubt, some man who acted as fugleman to the rest, was constantly looking up and watching him. (*BR*, pp. 375-76)

At the end of the novel, Chester is killed in a duel, but Gashford escapes unpunished. After many years of flitting back and forth between England and the Continent as an informer, he is supposed to have committed suicide, but there is just enough doubt about the identity of the corpse to suggest that, devil that he was, he never really died.

The ambivalence revealed by the use of the two devil figures is carried on into the novel's conclusion. The end of the novel with its pattern of repentences and reconciliations would seem to argue the kind of optimistic outlook indicated by the use of Chester to symbolize evil as an external force. The last few chapters of the novel depict not only evil routed and order restored, but the creation of an order which is even better than that which was destroyed. Dolly finds her heart, the two pairs of lovers are united, Mrs. Varden learns to control her tongue and even becomes better looking as a result, the Golden Key is "hoisted up again in all the glory of a new coat of paint" (BR, p. 604), and the Maypole, renewed and purified, passes into the hands of Joe, who makes it, significantly, a haven for old soldiers (BR, p. 632).

But James Gottshall has argued that this apparently happy ending is off-set to some degree by the continued association of Barnaby and Grip:

> Grip, a clear symbol of evil ironically loved by the innocent boy, stands as a kind of externalized demon in possession of Barnaby, and it is significant that the two are together as the book ends.[80]

It is not only Grip's continued association with Barnaby that adds a note of ambivalence to the novel, Grip's very being is ambiguous. On the one hand, he is, as Gottshall has pointed out,[81] indirectly responsible for Barnaby's being almost hanged ("the fine old English gentleman" who coveted Grip turns up in London just in time to testify to Barnaby's sanity [BR, p. 574]). Grip, whose favourite cry is "'I'm a devil, I'm a devil,'" is clearly intended as something more than mere comic relief, in spite of the amusement Dickens derived from his real-life counterpart. Varden, who serves as a kind of moral touchstone in the work, is more than half-inclined to believe that Grip is all he says he is (BR, p. 51), and adds, "'If there's any wickedness going on, that raven's in it, I'll be sworn'" (BR, p. 53). On the other hand the final scenes of the novel tend to minimize any impression of Barnaby's and Grip's companionship as a species of devil-possession. It takes Barnaby some time to recover from the shock of the riots, but when he does, he becomes "more rational. Dating from the time of his recovery, he had a better memory and greater steadiness of purpose" (BR, p. 633), and we are told that "never was there a lighter-hearted husbandman, a creature more popular with young and old, a blither or more happy soul than Barnaby" (BR, p. 634).

The opposing tendencies, one basically optimistic, the other more pessimistic, implied in the double devils, the happy ending and the significance of Grip are left unresolved. The essential optimism about the nature of man which find expression in Pickwick, Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop with their stress on innocence is considerably weakened in this novel, but it is still a factor, and the happy ending and the assigning to Chester of a function basically no different from Fagin's is an indication of it. But the hint (for I can call it no more than that) of a darker presence in Grip, the unusual stress throughout the novel on law and restraint, and Gashford's role in bringing out the worst in men would seem to indicate a growing pessimism.

CHAPTER II

THE MIDDLE PERIOD: FALSE EDENS AND THE QUEST FOR SELFHOOD

Introduction

The novels of Dickens's early period tend, on the whole, to deal with two fairly large and clearly defined moral categories--good and evil. Characters in these novels, at least until Barnaby Rudge, display very little in the way of moral ambiguity. They either recognize and serve the good as exemplified by the innocent protagonist, or they give their allegiance to the devil of the novel. There are some minor exceptions to this rule: Nancy belongs to Fagin's gang, but ultimately risks and loses her life trying to save Oliver, and Dick Swiveller is content to drift along in a kind of moral indifference until his compassion is awakened by the plight of the Marchioness. Generally speaking, however, it is not really until we come to his novels of the next decade that Dickens turns his attention away from a fairly clear-cut depiction of an encounter between moral opposites to concentrate on characters who are more morally mixed. The interest of each of the three novels following Barnaby Rudge which I shall deal with in this chapter (Martin Chuzzlewit, Dombey and Son and David Copperfield) is on an adult male who displays more (in the case of Mr. Dombey) or less (in the case of David Copperfield) serious flaws in his character which he must learn to recognize and to deal with. Where the moral conflicts depicted in the early novels tend to be externalized--a devil threatens or attacks an innocent victim--in the novels of the middle period the internal moral conflict within the protagonist is of central importance. Martin Chuzzlewit has to learn that his own selfishness is at the root of most of his unhappiness, and that, as David Copperfield reveals, the quest for Eden is a mistaken impulse. Mr. Dombey has to acknowledge his responsibility for the suffering he both undergoes and inflicts, and David Copperfield, perhaps most significantly of all, has to put aside his hankering for a lost childhood bliss and learn to assume responsibility for himself.

I suggested in my discussion of the early novels that one can perhaps detect within these works certain signs to indicate that Dickens was aware of some deficiencies and limitations in his concept of innocence as a moral ideal, limitations which are deliberately exposed in his portrayal of Barnaby Rudge as both perpetually innocent and feeble-minded, and in his careful analysis of the disastrous consequences of Barnaby's inability to distinguish between good and evil.

In my analysis of three novels of the middle period I hope to show how a continuing concern with the moral difficulties posed by the relatively simple (at least compared with the far more complex definition of the concept to be found in Little Dorrit) notion of innocence with which the young Dickens began continues to be reflected in these works. There are a certain number of devil figures in these novels, and I also intend to show how Dickens's evolving awareness of the complexity of evil and its role in human behaviour leads him to assign to these devil figures roles which are significantly different from those of the earlier devils.

Martin Chuzzlewit

Martin Chuzzlewit, the first of the novels of the middle period, has attracted considerable attention from critics (much more, for example, than Barnaby Rudge), largely, I think, because it is seen as something of a problem. It is a book with undeniable signs of greatness, but at the same time, oddly unsatisfactory in many ways. Although Dickens himself insisted when he wrote it that "it was in a hundred points immeasurably the best of my stories,"[1] many of his readers did not agree and an alarming drop in sales led to a rupture with his publishers. Forster acknowledged it to be "by much the most masterly of his writings hitherto,"[2] but at the same time judged it "defective" in "construction and conduct of story."[3] Gissing too was of two minds about it. "The book would perhaps rank as [Dickens's] finest," he wrote, were it not "so ill put together."[4] The novel contains a dazzling display of Dickensian comic creations--Pecksniff, Sairey Gamp, Young Bailey, Mr. Moddle, Poll Sweedlepipe and the Mould family--but it also contains Ruth Pinch whom Dickens makes tiresome by his repeated references to her little hands, little feet, even, at one point, little beef pie, in an admiring tone which seems to imply that littleness itself somehow guarantees both charm and virtue; Mary Graham who is not much more than a long-suffering cipher; Mr. Bevan, a cardboard mouthpiece; and that bad-tempered old fairy godfather, Martin, Sr. The quality of the work is very uneven: the brilliant second chapter with its vivid description of an autumn wind blowing Pecksniff off his feet is preceeded by a flat opening chapter full of heavy jocularity. The same novel which contains a penetrating analysis of the mind of a murderer also contains a very stagey recognition scene in which all the characters are dragged in by the scruff of the neck to witness the unmasking of Pecksniff. Biting satire jostles the treacly love story of John Westlock and Ruth Pinch, and perhaps even more damagingly, the virtuous Tom Pinch, whom we are invited to admire, manages at one point to sound dangerously like Pecksniff. And yet, one cannot dismiss _Chuzzlewit_. It is one of the first of his works in which Dickens labours consciously to construct the narrative around a single unifying theme, and it is also, as A. E. Dyson notes, "the first of Dickens's novels to produce an array of critics each proudly bearing a key, but each confronting a different door, or at least a remarkably different-shaped lock."[5] Dyson's own key has to do with comic vision and tone, a "radiance"[6] which for him bathes even the first chapter--"that delightful exercise in pseudo-scholarship."[7] Edward B. Benjamin[8] discovers a unifying principle in the treatment of hypocrisy, Hillis Miller[9] and Steven Marcus[10] in the anatomy of self-hood, and Dorothy Van Ghent in "the view from Todgers."[11] Although a number of recent critics like James Kincaid,[12] Joseph Gold[13] and Bert Hornback[14] have made elaborate arguments in defence of the work's essential unity, Barbara Hardy's tart opening observation in her commentary on the novel is one I would echo:

> At this time in critical history it seems impossible to begin, as I should like to, with the assumption that most readers of Dickens will agree with John Forster, Gissing and various other critics, that _Martin Chuzzlewit_ is a badly organized novel.[15]

Badly organized, flawed and uneven as it is, I have chosen to include it in my discussion of the novels of the middle period because it nevertheless casts some important light on the general trend of Dickens's ideas concerning the theme of innocence and the demonic which is the topic of my dissertation.

Steven Marcus has suggested that the novels of Dickens's middle period, beginning with Chuzzlewit, "have in common [the] impulse to reach some kind of reconciliation with society."[16] Although the novels of the earlier period tend to concern themselves with a hero whose innocence sets him apart from society, and whose ultimate destination is a sheltered, pastoral refuge, similarly set apart from the world, certain of these early works also show subordinate figures finding their salvation in commitment, within the imperfect society rejected by the innocent hero, to equally imperfect fellow beings. Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness are, as I have already tried to suggest, an early instance of this pattern. Barnaby Rudge reveals a fuller exploration of the issues involved in living in, rather than retreating from, society in its concern with questions relating to law, discipline, and moral responsibility. It is the more detailed examination of these themes in Martin Chuzzlewit which I find to constitute that novel's main interest. Themes which have been only lightly touched upon in the earlier works are here brought together and developed, not perhaps as coherently as they might be, but with sufficient clarity to indicate the general direction in which Dickens was moving at this particular period.

The main theme of the novel, in an expansion of the theme of Barnaby Rudge, has to do with the inter-relatedness of men attempting to live together in society. The fact that Dickens claimed to have constructed the novel around the theme of "self" does not imply a contradiction of what I have just stated. The selfishness exhibited by most of the principal characters in the novel, especially young Martin, represents an attempt to deny social bonds, an attempt to live in private, self-enclosed worlds. As he struggles to achieve total independence from the rest of the world, Martin ironically repeats the pattern of the earlier novels. In these works the innocent heroes and heroines travel *through*, but do not really belong *to*, the corrupt world in which their adventures take place. They are all, at least to some extent, outsiders. Pickwick is a Don Quixote figure who inhabits the private world of his innocence, and who withdraws at the end of the novel into his snug little retreat at Dulwich. It is significant that he is depicted as a bachelor and remains one, in spite of the machinations of Mrs. Bardell; no ties connect him with the fallen world--he and his friends belong to a separate, innocent society. Oliver as a pauper child and illegitimate orphan is an outcast from birth: although the novel's conclusion depicts his incorporation into a society in which he discovers his real name and parentage, the pastoral world of the Maylies, whatever its ambiguities, is meant to be seen as Dulwich and Dingley Dell all over again, an independent, innocent realm which exists apart from the corrupt world which surrounds it. Little Nell's is a soul of such purity that no earthly community is fit to keep her, but the remote little village in which she dies comes as close to providing her with refuge as any human community can. Barnaby inhabits the private world of his madness, but he too is ultimately received and accepted in a pastoral retreat. In all of these novels Dickens employs the same basic pattern: the innocent hero is finally, after all his struggles with the corrupt world, whisked off to safety somewhere in the pure countryside.

Martin Chuzzlewit begins where these other novels end. After an opening chapter of Chuzzlewit family history, we are given an elaborate description of the small Wiltshire village in which Pecksniff makes his home. Although the time is autumn, the atmosphere is springlike. Even the obvious signs of the coming of winter are less indicative of decay than of a rich pastoral beauty:

> The wet grass sparkled in the light; the scanty patches of verdure in the hedges--where a few green twigs yet stood together bravely, resisting to the last the tyranny of nipping winds and early frosts--took heart and brightened up; the stream which had been dull and sullen all day long, broke out into a cheerful smile; the birds began to chirp and twitter on the naked boughs, as though the hopeful creatures half believed that winter had gone by, and spring had come already. The vane upon the tapering spire of the old church glistened from its lofty station in sympathy with the general gladness; and from the ivy-shaded windows such gleams of light shone back upon the glowing sky, that it seemed as if the quiet buildings were the hoarding-place of twenty summers, and all their ruddiness and warmth were stored within.
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> The fallen leaves, with which the ground was strewn, gave forth a pleasant fragrance . . . On the motionless branches of some trees, autumn berries hung like clusters of coral beads, as in those fabled orchards where the fruits were jewels . . . Still athwart their darker boughs, the sunbeams struck out paths of deeper gold; and the red light, mantling in among their swarthy branches, used them as foils to set its brightness off, and aid the lustre of the dying day. (MC, pp. 7-8)

It sounds like Dingley Dell, Chertsey or Tong all over again. But it is all illusory; the peaceful beauty vanishes in a moment to be replaced by a winter atmosphere of death and decay:

> A moment and its glory was no more. The sun went down beneath the long dark lines of hill and cloud which piled up in the west . . . the light was all withdrawn; the shining church turned cold and dark; the stream forgot to smile; the birds were silent; and the gloom of winter dwelt on everything.
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> An evening wind uprose too, and the slighter branches cracked and rattled as they moved, in skeleton dances . . . The withering leaves, no longer quiet, hurried to and fro in search of shelter from its chill pursuit; the labourer unyoked his horses, and with head bent down, trudged briskly home beside them . . . (MC, p. 8)

The description, which suggests Nature's implied comment on "the Wiltshire Adam" and his pseudo-paradise, helps to introduce a motif which is to be used repeatedly throughout the novel, the image of the false Eden. The village is the home of Seth Pecksniff, a monster of hypocrisy and selfishness who likes to pretend to himself and others that his country cottage is a paradisal retreat over which the "blessed star of Innocence" (MC, p. 79) shines. When interrupted by the arrival of callers during a particularly violent family quarrel, he stages a little masquerade which makes an explicit connection between himself and the unfallen Adam. "Gently warbling a rustic stave [he] put[s] on his garden hat, seize[s] a spade" (MC, p. 384), and welcomes his guests:

> "You find me in my garden-dress. You will excuse it, I know. It is an ancient pursuit, gardening. Primitive, my dear sir . . . Adam was the first of our calling. My Eve, I grieve to say, is no more, sir, but . . . I do a little bit of Adam still." (MC, p. 384)

With his ironically-named daughters, Mercy and Charity (Mercy is malicious and Charity is stingy), he acts out domestic tableaux designed to prove to the world that his family conducts itself with the innocent compassion and charity represented by the Maylies and Mr. Brownlow in Oliver Twist. When young Martin arrives to take his place as Pecksniff's student, one such scene is enacted for his benefit:

> Mr. Pecksniff had clearly not expected them for some hours to come: for he was surrounded by open books, and was glancing from volume to volume, with a black-lead pencil in his mouth, and a pair of compasses in his hand, at a vast number of mathematical diagrams . . . Neither had Miss Charity expected them, for she was busied, with a capacious wicker basket before her, in making impractical nightcaps for the poor. Neither had Miss Mercy expected them, for she was sitting upon her stool, tying on the--oh good gracious!--the petticoat of a large doll that she was dressing for a neighbour's child . . . It would be difficult, if not impossible, to conceive a family so thoroughly taken by surprise as the Pecksniff's were, on this occasion. (MC, p. 79)

This is a parody of the kind of world that Dickens prepared for the reception of the innocent outcasts of the earlier novels, and it is significant that young Martin should decide to join Pecksniff's household. Martin is no suffering young innocent (insufferable would be nearer the mark), but he is an outcast of sorts, largely through his own choosing, and it is to the home of "the Wiltshire Adam" that he goes in search of refuge. While young Oliver is full of chivalrous love for the mother he has never known, young Martin has no family feeling at all. When Tom Pinch, learning of his orphaned state, attempts to commiserate with him, Martin coolly informs him that his sympathy is uncalled for:

> "Why, as to that, you know, Pinch . . . it's all very right and proper to be fond of parents when we have them, and to bear them in remembrance after they're dead, if you have ever known anything of them. But as I never did know anything about mine personally, you know, why, I can't be expected to be very sentimental about 'em. And I am not: that's the truth." (MC, p. 93)

He dislikes his surname ("'not a pretty one, and it takes a long time to sign'" [MC, p. 75]), has quarrelled with his grandfather, and has nothing but contempt for the rest of his relatives. His sense of his own self-importance effectively isolates him from all real communication with his fellows. His only friends, other than his supremely virtuous fiancee, are Tom Pinch who is too naive to perceive him with any clarity, and Mark Tapley, who befriends him as a means of getting "credit" for being "jolly" under particularly adverse circumstances. Martin's self-absorption renders him incapable of participating in society to any significant extent, and the course of the novel describes his attempts to retreat from society in search of "Edens" in which he can, as he thinks, more fully realize himself.

In a move anticipated by Mark Tapley and repeated by Tom Pinch, a move which reverses the pattern of the earlier novels in which the innocent hero flees from the city in search of the purer world of the countryside, Martin, after his expulsion from Wiltshire, journeys up to London. The novel ultimately concludes with Martin's acceptance of human community (symbolized by his marriage) and integration within society, symbolized by the city, but at this point in his career he is incapable of making his way there. Too proud to call on anyone for assistance, he slinks about the streets in self-conscious embarrassment at his poverty, and waits passively for someone or something to extricate him. When twenty pounds drops, as if by magic, into his lap, he goes off to America, convinced that this new world will recognize his merits and grant him the opportunities that England has failed to give him:

> . . . he never once doubted, one may almost say the certainty of doing great things in the New World, if he could only get there. In proportion as he became more and more dejected by his present circumstances, and the means of gaining America receded from his grasp, the more he fretted himself with the conviction that that was the only place in which he could hope to achieve any high end, and worried his brain with the thought that men going there in the meanwhile might anticipate him in the attainment of those objects which were dearest to his heart. (MC, p. 225)

The whole United States is another false Eden through which Dickens satirizes the romantic notion that it is civilization which corrupts and degrades man, that human nature need only be released from the artificial constraints of civilized society to achieve regeneration. This is, as I have tried to show, an important theme in Barnaby Rudge, and it is further developed in Martin Chuzzlewit. General Choke informs Martin that "'we are a new country, sir; man is in a more primeval state here, sir; we have not the excuse of having lapsed in the slow course of time into degenerate practices; we have no false gods; man, sir, here, is man in all his dignity. . . . What are the

United States for, sir . . . if not for the regeneration of man'" (MC, p. 349). The Americans see their nation as the new Eden, Paradise Regained:

> "the most powerful and highly-civilized do-minion that has ever graced the world, a do-minion, sir, where man is bound to man in one vast bond of equal love and truth." (MC, p. 358)

The "one vast bond" is a lie. The novel depicts a nation of selfish individuals, one in which each man is free to act in accordance with the most base and primitive impulses of human nature. The murderous Hannibal Chollop, who is "the consistent advocate of Lynch law and slavery" (MC, p. 520), and who specializes in tarring and feathering his opponents, refers to himself as "'planting the standard of civilization in the wilder gardens of My country'" (MC, p. 520). The American episodes reveal how a society which denies its past inevitably debases its language, and the American use of the word civilization is an illustration of this. What the word seems to mean in American circles is the opposite of its conventional meaning, not the creation of ordered social structures, but the restoration of man to the state of nature. Chollop is held up to Martin as a shining example of human character, American style:

> "Our fellow-countryman is a model of a man, quite fresh from Natur's mould! . . . . He is a true-born child of this free hemisphere! Verdant as the mountains of our country; bright and flowing as our mineral Licks; unspoiled by withering conventionalities as air our broad Perearers! Rough he may be. So air our Barrs. Wild he may be. So air our Buffalers. But he is a child of Natur', and a child of Freedom; and his boastful answer to the Despot and Tyrant is, that his bright home is in the Settin' Sun." (MC, p. 534)

The nature imagery which Elijah Pogram uses to eulogize this "child of Natur'" links the specious Eden of America with the false Eden of Chapter II. Martin has learned to recognize that the Americans' rejection of "the withering conventionalities" of ordered society must ultimately lead to anarchy:

> "The mass of your countrymen begin by neglecting little social observances, which have nothing to do with gentility, custom, usage, government or country, but are acts of common, decent, natural, human politeness. You abet them in this by resenting all attacks upon their social offences as if they were a beautiful national feature. From disregarding small obligations they come in regular course to disregard large ones, and so refuse to pay their debts. What they may do, or what they may refuse to do next, I don't know; but any man may see if he will, that it will be something following in natural succession, and a part of one great growth, which is rotten at the root." (MC, p. 537)

But he has not yet learned to apply this lesson to himself. When he hears of the land-tract called Eden, he is in a fever of impatience to acquire one of the lots, "'reserved,'" according to Scadder, "'for Aristocrats of Natur'" (MC, p. 354).

Eden is the concentrated essence of the new world. A primeval wilderness, it is not the glowing paradisal garden of the European imagination (see, for example, Marvell's "Bermudas"), but a dismal swamp; a place of rotting vegetation where even the trees look like weeds, ramshackle hovels sport pretentious titles, and the settlers are all half-dead with fever. Martin had expected to find a thriving metropolis set in the midst of the wilderness, a place capable of appreciating and using his talents. Instead, he finds a primitive village where "three or four meagre dogs, wasted and vexed with hunger, some long-legged pigs . . . [and] some children, nearly naked . . . were all the living things he saw" (MC, p. 381). The retreat from civilization in a search for regeneration through a return to nature creates a world in which human beings literally cannot live:

> Those who had the means of going away had all deserted it. Those who were left had lost their wives, their children, friends, or brothers there . . . Most of them were ill then: none were the

> men they had once been. (MC, p. 381)

Martin almost immediately sickens: "he had greatly changed, even in one night. He was very pale and languid; he spoke of pain and weakness in his limbs, and complained that his sight was dim and his voice feeble" (MC, p. 381). The suddenness with which he falls ill is not perhaps entirely convincing, but in symbolic terms there is a certain appropriateness to it. Eden is a grim parody of the romantic notion of the return to nature; Dickens shows the concept to involve a way of life profoundly *un*natural for man. One is inevitably reminded of Burke's words on the subject:

> The state of civil society . . . is a state of nature--and much more truly so than a savage and incoherent. For man is by nature reasonable, and he is never perfectly in his natural state, but when he is placed where reason may be best cultivated, and most predominates. Art is man's nature. We are as much, at least, in a state of Nature in formed manhood as in immature and helpless infancy. Men, qualified in the manner I have just described, form in Nature, as she operates in the common modifications of society, the leading, guiding and governing part. It is the soul to the body, without which the man does not exist.[17]

Burke's reference to "immature and helpless infancy" is particularly relevant, I think, to what Dickens had been trying to do in the earlier novels. Childhood innocence had been held up as the ideal, and at the same time, natural condition of man. Civilization was seen as that which corrupted and *de*natured, so that the proper dwelling place of innocence had to be found away from the cities in the pastoral world of the countryside. *Martin Chuzzlewit* reverses this pattern. It is significant that the first evidence of Martin's somewhat abrupt moral conversion should be his new awareness of the needs and claims of others and his decision "'to quit this settlement for ever, and get back to England'" (MC, p. 526). The decision to return to England, specifically

London, is symbolic of Martin's acceptance of human interdependence, a point reinforced by the final events of the novel. Martin is reconciled with his grandfather, re-united with Mary and called upon to witness the almost ritualistic unmasking of Pecksniff. Dickens's method of dragging in all the principal characters to participate in this event has been justly criticized for its clumsiness, but at the same time, I think it possible to view it as an attempt to represent a community acting in concert to cast out and punish its common enemy. Martin cements his bonds with this community by publicly begging Tom Pinch's forgiveness, an act which removes the last of John Westlock's mistrust of him, then presides over what is a veritable love-feast in honour of Tom. Like the earlier novels, Martin Chuzzlewit concludes with the hero's incorporation in society, but this society is part of, not separate from, the rest of the world.

The turning point in Martin's career occurs while, just having recovered from fever himself, he nurses a very sick Mark Tapley. Struck by the contrast between Mark's cheerful patience and his own angry self-pity, he is moved to examine his own attitudes, and to discover hitherto unsuspected truths about his own character:

> It was natural for him to reflect--he had months to do it in--upon his own escape, and Mark's extremity. This led him to consider which of them could be better spared, and why? Then the curtain slowly rose a very little way; and Self, Self, Self, was shown below.
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> It was long before he fixed the knowledge of himself so firmly in his mind that he could thoroughly discern the truth . . . reflection came . . . and so he felt and knew the failing of his life, and saw distinctly what an ugly spot it was. (MC, p. 525)

Barbara Hardy has severely criticized Dickens's handling of Martin's change of heart on the grounds that the evidence of Martin's earlier selfishness is not presented convincingly: it "is shown in exposition . . . in a series of trivial physical gestures which are closer to theatrical business than to dramatic action,"[18] and the conversion, when it does come, is far too abrupt:

> Action is implied rather than dramatized in this moral change, and although the abruptness, the crisis, and the use of external example in Mark, are characteristic of many of Dickens's sudden conversions, the absence of any sense of time is particularly noticeable . . . because of the general superficial treatment of Martin's moral conduct.[19]

Nevertheless, Dickens's attempt to describe a character's discovery that he is himself responsible in large measure for the pain and unhappiness he has had to endure represents an important departure from the pattern of the earlier novels. In those works, Dickens's self-pitying recollection of his own childhood leads him, as Peter Coveney and others have pointed out, to depict his heroes as the totally blameless victims of demonic conspiracies. Dickens's conception of Martin's character, whatever the flaws in execution, is evidence of a growing maturity and helps prepare the way for characters like Pip, Arthur Clennam and Eugene Wrayburn.

Dickens's new-found maturity is also reflected in his handling of Jonas Chuzzlewit. Jonas is the principal villain of the piece, but he is no devil, nor has he embarked on a murderous career because he has succumbed to the wiles of a Fagin or a Quilp. His victim, Tigg Montague, is initially depicted with some hints of the demonic,[20] but these are not developed and his death, when it occurs, contains no suggestion of the divine retribution that overtook Fagin, Quilp and Chester. Instead, it can be seen as the inevitable consequence of Jonas' rejection of all human bonds, a re-enactment of the story of Cain and Abel, symbolically, the murder of a brother. As Jonas sets out for the scene of the crime, "he looked back across his shoulder . . . to see if his quick footsteps still fell dry across the dusty pavement, or were already moist and clogged with the red mire that stained the naked feet of Cain" (MC, p. 720). The events which have led Jonas to this pass are fully explicable in human terms. Dickens's attempt to describe the relationships of men in society in more complex terms than he had attempted hitherto enables him for the first time to dispense with a devil-figure.[21] Jonas is a murderer because his whole education and upbringing have pointed him in that direction. His "education . . . had been conducted from his cradle on the strictest principles of the main chance" (MC, p. 119). His engrained habit "of considering everything as a question of property" (MC, p. 119) has been assiduously cultivated by his father:

> "I taught him, I trained him. This is the heir of my bringing up. Sly, cunning and covetous, he'll not squander my money. I worked for this; I hoped for this; it has been the great end and aim of my life." (MC, p. 180)

As Dickens notes in his preface:

> I conceive that the sordid coarseness and brutality of Jonas would be unnatural, if there had been nothing in his early education, and in the precept and example always before him, to engender and develop the vices that make him odious. But so born and so bred; admired for that which made him hateful, and justified from his cradle in cunning, treachery and avarice; I claim him as the legitimate heir of the father upon whom these vices are seen to recoil.
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> I make this comment and solicit the reader's attention to it in his or her consideration of this tale, because nothing is more common in real life than a want of profitable reflection on the causes of many vices and crimes that awaken general horror. (MC, Preface, p. xv)

The attempt to explain human misery and wickedness in terms of environment and education does not stop with Jonas. Martin's selfishness is explained to old Martin by Mark Tapley:

> "There was always a deal of good in him, but a little of it got crusted over somehow. I can't say who rolled the paste of that 'ere crust myself, but--"
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> "Go on," said Martin, "Why do you stop?"
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> "But it--well! I beg your pardon, but I think it may have been you, sir. Unintentional, I think it may have been you." (MC, p. 798)

Tom Pinch tells his sister's employers that their daughter's contempt for

Ruth is the inevitable outcome of their own example:

> "Why, how can you, as an honest gentleman, profess displeasure or surprise at your daughter telling my sister she is something beggarly and humble, when you are forever telling her the same thing yourself in fifty plain, out-speaking ways, though not in words; and when your very porter and footman make the same delicate announcement to all comers?" (MC, p. 574)

Even Mercy and Charity Pecksniff, one suspects, have been trained to adopt certain roles. Pecksniff as the family stage-director has type-cast his children. One recalls Harold Skimpole with his artistically-differentiated daughters:

> "You must see my daughters. I have a blue-eyed daughter who is my Beauty daughter, I have a Sentiment daughter and a Comedy daughter. You must see them all. They'll be enchanted." (BH, p. 595)

The elder Miss Pecksniff has been designated the practical, sober daughter, keeper of the keys and household accounts, so Mercy, in order to "set . . . up in business on an entirely different principle" (MC, p. 12) must be coy, kittenish and whimsical.

Although Dickens places great stress on the influence of environment in the formation of character, he tries to avoid the implication that there is, then, no such thing as moral responsibility. In Martin Chuzzlewit characters are confronted with situations in which they must exercise choice, and thus assume responsibility for the consequences of their decisions. There is a certain mechanical and artificial quality to the way in which these situations are set up. They are put forward a little too patly, a little too much like the traditional tests and ordeals of the fairy tale. For example, the whole charade of old Martin's presence in the Pecksniff household is designed to present Pecksniff with a clear-cut opportunity to renounce his hypocrisy, put in a good word for young Martin, and thus save himself:

"Observe!" said Martin, looking round. "I put myself in that

> man's hands on terms as mean and base, and as degrading to himself as I could render them in words . . . If I had only called the angry blood into his face, I would have wavered in my purpose. If I had only stung him into being a man for a minute I would have abandoned it. If he had offered me one word of remonstrance, in favour of the grandson he supposed I had disinherited . . . I think I could have borne with him forever afterwards. But not a word, not a word." (MC, p. 805)

Young Martin's conversion has a similar pat and over-abrupt quality to it, as Barbara Hardy has pointed out; nevertheless the attempt to deal with the question represents a more complex vision than that of the earlier novels, where such issues are for the most part ignored.

The career of Jonas Chuzzlewit is interesting for reasons other than its bearing on the issues of character formation and moral responsibility. Since his specific flaw is a more extreme version of Martin's selfishness, what happens to him can be read as commentary on the main theme. Martin undergoes a symbolic death as the prelude to his reintegration with society: "he felt how nearly Self had dropped into the grave, and what a poor, dependent, miserable thing it was" (MC, p. 524). In an ironic parallel, Jonas prepares for the murder by shutting himself up "in a blotched, stained, mouldering room like a vault" (MC, p. 718). When he emerges from it to commit the crime, he has the taste of the grave in his mouth; "a taste of rust, and dust, and earth, and rotting wood" (MC, p. 719). Martin learned in Eden that to attempt to deny his connection with the rest of humanity was a denial of life. Eden, as a false paradise, is a region of living death, a kind of hell. The boat that carries Martin to it "might have been old Charon's boat, conveying melancholy shades to Judgement" (MC, p. 375), and the place itself, "the grim domains of Giant Despair" (MC, p. 377).

> A flat morass, bestrewn with fallen timber; a marsh on which the good growth of the earth seemed to have been wrecked and cast away, that from its decomposing ashes vile and ugly things might

> rise . . . where fatal maladies, seeking whom they might infect, came forth at night in misty shapes, and creeping out upon the water, hunted them like spectres until day; where even the blessed sun, shining down on festering elements of corruption and disease, became a horror. (_MC_, p. 377)

Martin rejects Eden, but Jonas, in his decision to murder, retreats further from life into death. Like Barnaby Rudge, Sr., another murderer, his denial of all human bonds turns him into a ghost-like creature. After the murder he is filled with fear of the imaginary self he had created as an alibi:

> He was so horribly afraid of that infernal room at home. This made him, in a gloomy, murderous, mad way, not only fearful _for_ himself, but _of_ himself; for being, as it were, a part of the room; a something supposed to be there, yet missing from it. (_MC_, p. 726)

The immediate result of the murder is that "he became in a manner, his own ghost and phantom, and was at once the haunting spirit and the haunted man" (_MC_, p. 727). Martin learns that self-fulfillment comes through the acceptance of human bonds (indeed, one of the first things he has to do before he can leave Eden is to write to Mr. Bevan, confessing his foolishness and throwing himself on the American's generosity); Jonas' attempt to deny them (the attempted murder of his own father is the most dramatic example) leads to spiritual death. His final act of self-destruction is only the physical manifestation of the death he died long ago.

In his fuller treatment of themes only lightly suggested in his first five novels, Dickens breaks new ground in _Martin Chuzzlewit_. Some of the concerns of the earlier period, however, still attract his attention, particularly the notion of innocence. There are no children in this novel, other than the very unOliver-like Bailey, a fact which is probably significant in itself. Tom Pinch, however, who could be "almost any age between sixteen and sixty" (MC, p. 18), can be regarded as a sort of feeble version of Pickwick. Other characters in the novel see him as essentially child-like in nature: Martin calls him a "child" (MC, p. 193) on one occasion and on another refers to him as "quite an infant" (MC, p. 238). He has a Pickwickian streak of boyishness which manifests itself during a visit to Salisbury. Like a schoolboy with a half-holiday he blows some of his meagre pocket money on an elaborate seven-bladed knife that won't cut anything, then loses himself in imagination among the children's books in a shop. Later, "he stopped to read the playbill at the theatre, and surveyed the doorway with a kind of awe which was not diminished when a sallow gentleman with long dark hair came out, and told a boy to run home to his lodgings and bring his broadsword. Mr. Pinch stood rooted to the spot on hearing this" (MC, p. 72). In a symbolic confrontation with Jonas, he routs him, as it were, inadvertently, with something like Pickwickian ease (MC, p. 392). He appears to be almost universally beloved, especially by children, who come tumbling out to greet him "shrieking in tiny chorus" (MC, p. 65). But there are disquieting elements in the portrayal. Some of the love that Tom inspires is patronizing and half-contemptuous: "Who minded Mr. Pinch. There was no harm in *him*." (MC, p. 65); and the innocent eyes with which he beholds the world result not in a clearer vision of reality, but in a naive inability to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Tom worships Pecksniff and only the testimony of the equally pure-hearted Mary Graham finally convinces him that "there was no Pecksniff; there never had been a Pecksniff" (MC, p. 501). His innocence, maintained long past childhood, makes him an appealing figure, but it also renders him unfit to function effectively in a fallen world. As John Westlock warns him, "'You haven't half enough of the devil in you. Half enough! You haven't any.'" Tom responds, "'If I haven't, I suppose I'm all the better for it,'" but John replies, "'All the better! . . . All the worse, you mean to say'" (MC, p. 21). Although Robert McCarron[22] argues that Tom is an example of the Holy Fool, and an unambiguous instance of innocence in the novel, John's speech more clearly suggests that Tom's "innocence" is not a virtue, but a handicap.

Tom's portrait is troubling, however, not because Dickens has presented Tom's innocence as an endearing quality, and at the same time indicated that it is to be regarded as a defect (this does not seem an unreasonable position), but rather because of the presence of a certain element in Dickens's tone when he writes of Tom. The frequency with which he uses "the apostrophe-trick"[23] has been noted by many critics and sometimes attributed to the influence of Carlyle. It is more than just a stylistic device; it indicates, I think, a certain ambivalence in Dickens's attitude toward Tom. The repeated "poor Tom's," "dear Tom's," and so forth (see MC, pp. 63, 395, 489, and 610) have much the same tone of patronizing affection that the young ladies exhibit in their remark that "there is no harm in him." It is perhaps possible that Dickens, still more than a little sentimentally attached to the ideal of innocence, and feeling somewhat guilty about some of the things he has implied about its disadvantages, is trying to compensate by insisting too stridently upon the sweetness and tenderness of "dear Tom's" child-like nature. Barbara Hardy has detected a certain resemblance between Tom and the unfortunate Mr. Moddle[24] and cites it as an instance of "unintentional self-parody,"[25] but an even more damaging similarity can be seen between Tom and Pecksniff. As Tom responds to Martin's unjust accusation, there is a very strong Pecksniffian ring to Tom's tone of wounded innocence:

> "Tut, tut!" said Tom . . . "He is mistaken. He is deceived. Why should you mind? He is sure to be set right at last." (MC, p. 765)

He has also apparently mastered something of Pecksniff's highly developed technique of the surreptitious tear and the choked pause:

> Presently [Tom] said aloud, turning a leaf as he spoke, "He will be very sorry for this," and a tear stole down his face and dropped upon the page.
>
> . . . .
>
> "I am quite--comforted," said Tom. "It will be set right."
> "Such a cruel, bad return!" cried Ruth.
> "No, no," said Tom. "He believes it. I cannot imagine why. But it will be set right." (MC, p. 766)

One has only to compare these passages with Pecksniff's response to Old Martin's accusations in the great unmasking scene:

> "Thank you. That savours," said Mr. Pecksniff, taking out his pocket-handkerchief, "of your old familiar frankness. You have paid for it. I was about to make the remark. You have deceived me, sir. Thank you again. I am glad of it. To see you in the possession of your health and faculties on any terms, is, in itself, a sufficient recompense. To have been deceived implies a trusting nature. Mine is a trusting nature. I am thankful for it. I would rather have a trusting nature, do you know, sir, than a doubting one." (MC, p. 811)

The Pecksniffian echo is not only to be found in Tom's confidence of eventual vindication, but even in the repetition of the characteristically short and choppy rhythms of Pecksniffian rhetoric.

The problem, I think, is created by a diminution of the confident optimism that created Pickwick. The desire to believe in both the possibility and the moral validity of innocence as an ideal is still very strong, but the conviction has been weakened by a growing awareness both of its inadequacies and of the power and complexity of evil, and the result is a certain falseness of tone. *Martin Chuzzlewit* is, as I noted at the outset, a seriously flawed work of art, but it nevertheless marks an important stage in Dickens's development. The false Eden motif marks a much stronger repudiation of the impulse to retreat which is so marked a characteristic of the early novels, than anything he had written to date, and helps to prepare the way for *David Copperfield*. In addition, *Chuzzlewit* reveals a turning away from the relatively simple formula of novels like *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* which turn on an encounter between an innocent victim and a demonic villain, to depict more complex situations involving evil as a facet of human nature rather than an externalized force.

Dombey and Son

Dombey and Son, in spite of the claims made by some on behalf of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, is more usually regarded as "the first masterpiece of Dickens's maturity."[26] Kathleen Tillotson calls it "the earliest example of responsible and successful planning,"[27] and Hillis Miller describes it as being more unified than any previous work.[28] Dickens's attempt in *Chuzzlewit* to impose a more strictly schematized structure than he had used hitherto is not entirely successful. The novel is marred, as I mentioned earlier, by a certain rigidity and constraint; some of the incidents are mechanical and stagey concessions to the demands of the plot. In *Dombey*, however, one begins to see something of the kind of richly detailed and at the same time thematically relevant image patterns which one associates with the great symbolic novels of Dickens's later period. Every reader of *Dombey* must be aware of the intricate patterning of sea imagery throughout the novel. In addition, Kathleen Tillotson has drawn attention to the complexity of the railway as a symbol in the work,[29] and William Axton has demonstrated other uses of symbolism in the references to clocks and time, Sol Gill's bottle of madeira wine, and in Dickens's use of the story of Dick Whittington.[30] Dickens attempted something similar in Martin Chuzzlewit with his use of the repeated Eden motif, but its handling lacks the unobtrusive sureness of touch that distinguishes Dombey and Son.

The new sophistication which so many critics have noted in Dickens's handling of technique in Dombey and Son is also evident in his complex treatment, in this work, of some of the familiar elements of the earlier novels. The early novels, as we have seen, tend to turn primarily on a stark encounter between innocence and the demonic. The major task of the innocent protagonists of these works is the preservation of their innocence, and this is most often achieved by their removal from the fallen world, either by death or by retreat into an unfallen world. Dombey and Son exhibits some of the elements of this basic pattern, but they appear in a significantly altered form which reflects Dickens's growing maturity and complexity of vision.

Children, after their virtual banishment from the world of Martin Chuzzlewit, reappear in Dombey, but the novel's chief protagonist is neither Florence nor her little brother, but an adult figure, the icy Mr. Dombey. Dombey victimizes his children, but he is, nevertheless, a sympathetic figure rather than a villain, and his slow advance towards repentence and redemption is the principal source of dramatic interest in the novel. Children are important in the novel, but for all the pathos of little Paul's doomed existence, there is a strong implied suggestion that the child, had he lived, might have inherited his father's haughtiness along with the firm. Paul's sister, the saintly Florence, is more like the children of the earlier novels in that she is clearly another of Dickens's perpetual innocents, but she differs from Oliver and Nell in that the preservation of her innocence is not really her most important task. Within the context of Dombey and Son the child, as represented by Florence, functions chiefly not as an exemplar of threatened innocence, but as an instrument of redemption for fallen adults. This role brings her into more vital contact with the fallen world than the children of the earlier novels, and is in marked contrast to the spiritual aloofness of Oliver, and especially Nell. (Mr. Pickwick, who is responsible for the redemption of Alfred Jingle, is perhaps an exception.)

Along with the figure of the child, the novel also contains some of those familiar representatives of the demonic world who figure so prominently in the early novels, but here again, a significant alteration has been made in the type. The villains of Dombey and Son, upon examination, are seen to belong less to the world of the demonic than to the world of the fairy tale, and this modification results in what one might term a domestication of evil.

I should like to turn to a discussion of this last point first. In some ways, the presence of a strong fairy-tale element is perhaps the last thing one would expect to find in Dombey and Son. Dombey is, after all, the first of Dickens's novels to reflect clearly the contemporary scene, and as such, might not seem to present a particularly sympathetic environment for the introduction of fairy tale themes and types. Gone are the gothic horrors of Oliver Twist, and the coaches and inns of Pickwick's semi-mythic England. The chief protagonist of the novel is a Victorian businessman and the principal villain (as many have noted) is a member of the new managerial class. The railway fever of the 1840's and '50's is reflected in both setting and incident: characters in the novel travel across the countryside on fast trains, the destruction of working-class suburbs by the advent of the railway is depicted, and the villain is run over by a locomotive.

The world of Dombey then is neither Pickwick's merry England, the festering slums of Oliver Twist, nor the idyllic country villages of The Old Curiosity Shop. It is instead the contemporary urban and bourgeois world of mid-Victorian England, where the villains are "respectable," and the most sensational crimes are adultery and embezzlement, crimes which reflect the middle-class concern with the sanctity of marriage and property. Superficially at least, the novel appears to represent a decisive turning away from the more highly coloured world of the early novels, with their devils and murderers, nightmare landscapes and threatened innocents. Paul and Florence, of course, as child-victims are to some extent descendents of Oliver and Nell, but it is important to note that their trials take place within the context of a materially secure middle-class environment, and involve none of the physical dangers which threaten the earlier child-figures. Florence's abduction by Mrs. Brown comes closest to the kind of dangerous situation Nell and Oliver encounter, but this episode is really more important in its consequences for the infant Paul than as a threat to Florence. It is also important to note that after the death of little Paul, which occurs in the fourth number, the dramatic interest (in spite of Dickens's notes in his outline) tends to shift to Mr. Dombey. Florence remains a static figure (as it is of the nature of innocents to do) while her father undergoes real change and development.

Nevertheless, in spite of all these factors, which might lead one to expect something of the nature of a realistic novel, or, to use Frye's term, a work in the low mimetic mode,[31] the novel as a whole is permeated with the aura of the fairy tale. Dickens's affinity with the world of myth and fairy tale has long been a critical commonplace. Within two years of Dickens's death, Robert Buchanan called him "the creator of Human Fairyland,"[32] and Forster, speaking of the Christmas books, informs us that "no one was more intensely fond than Dickens of the old nursery tales . . . he had a secret delight in feeling that he was here only giving them a higher form."[33] Harry Stone, in an article on the novel as fairy tale, credits Dickens with having mastered a "new structural method which fuses autobiography, psychology, symbolism and fairy tale fancy,"[34] a technique which achieves a synthesis of the realistic novel and the fairy tale, and which embodies Dickens's special vision of life:

> That vision enhances reality. For Dickens's re-creation of his everyday world, even when he records it with hypnotic exactitude, possesses a fairy-tale essence which is projected and works upon the reader even when the reader has no clear notion of what he is responding to.[35]

Although one finds certain fairy tale elements in Dickens's earlier works, particularly in Oliver Twist, these, according to Stone, are an example of "fairy tale juggling--the arbitrary interposition of supernatural agencies;" while what takes place in Dombey involves "fairy tale enhancement,"[36] "a subtle and pervasive" synthesis of the fantastic with the realistic.

Michael Kotzkin, in Dickens and the Fairy Tale, goes considerably further than Stone in analyzing the function of fairy tale elements in the works of Dickens:

> He wrote a series of novels which give the old nursery tales "a higher form" which not only, like some of his articles, frequently allude to fairy tales and follow their narrative patterns, but which place fairy-tale type characters in fairy-tale type worlds and partly create the effects of fairy tales. In so doing he led the way in providing the Victorian novel with a source of the fantastic which is more appropriate to it than the Gothic novel, more normal and more domestic, but which still adds mystery and magic, and which evokes universal joys and fears and the timeless world of the dream.[37]

Kotzin, I think, is quite correct in suggesting that the function of the fairy tale elements in Dickens's novels is to give something of the universality of myth to realistic narratives rooted in the here and now, as well as to introduce an element of the mysterious and the fantastic without violating the somewhat prosaic sensibilities of Dickens's Victorian readers;[38] in Dombey and Son, however, fairy tale allusions serve additional purposes. Most of the characters in the novel, particularly those representing the forces of good, are drawn with one-dimensional simplicity. Florence for example, on whom, according to Dickens, the whole interest of the novel was to be thrown after the death of little Paul, is simply too slight a character to bear the burden, as Kathleen Tillotson has observed:

> A character conceived in terms of pure feeling, passive, innocent to the point of being almost "incapable of her own distress," can hardly sustain this prominence.[39]

One might say the same of Captain Cuttle. The Leavises, who object to people discussing Dickens's works in terms of fairy tales,[40] find Captain Cuttle "boring"[41]--and so he is, and so is Florence, if one insists upon judging them by the standards of the realistic novel.

When, however, one comes to see Florence as "the princess under a spell, or the unrecognized child of royal birth from whom a strange light shines, or even as Spenser's Una,"[42] her actions and responses take on an added depth which enriches the symbolic significance of the novel. So with Captain Cuttle; as a retired sea dog, he is simply unbelievable. A sailor of his naivete would have been knocked over the head and drowned in some foreign port on his first voyage out. When one perceives him instead as a kind of good geni who helps to counteract the malevolent influence of Carker and Bagstock, and who offers refuge to the wandering princess as her comic knight errant, he becomes a sympathetic and a touching figure.

Kotzin mentions Dickens's use of "the narrative pattern of fairy tales," but he does not develop the point. Neither does Harry Stone, although both critics identify a wealth of allusions to specific fairy tales, and Stone in particular describes their integration into the narrative fabric of the novel. I would argue, however, that Dickens's use of fairy-tale motifs in Dombey and Son is even more complex than has usually been recognized; that it constitutes the main principle of structural unity in the novel, and that it is employed for both stylistic and thematic purposes. Dombey is not just full of fairy-tale allusions; its plot itself suggests a traditional fairy-tale pattern. If Florence is "the wandering princess," a figure whom Dickens likens to "the King's fair daughter in the story" (D&S, p. 320), then her merchant-prince father is the king, a king who is the victim of an evil spell which turns his heart to ice. Carker is the evil enchanter, who, although he did not cast the spell, helps to maintain it. The variety of animal imagery with which he is associated, while calling attention to his role as predator, also suggests the traditional ability of fairy-tale enchanters to change their shapes at will. Subordinate characters enlisted in the cause of evil include a witch, an ogress, and a demon. The enchanter finally meets his doom at the hands of a red-eyed, fire-breathing monster, but the spell upon the king cannot be lifted except by his innocent young daughter, whom he has banished. During her period of exile she is comforted and sustained by the company of good spirits, the chief of whom is Captain Cuttle. After marrying her long-lost prince and journeying with him to the other side of the world, she returns to her father's side, just in time to save him from self-destruction. She breaks the spell which binds his frozen heart, enabling him to recognize her and to beg forgiveness, then carries him off from his mouldering palace to the shores of the life-giving sea, where a kind of magical restoration of his dead son is effected--"and they all lived happily ever after."

Dickens's earlier novels, as one will recall, set a demonic villain against an innocent protagonist in an almost archetypal conflict. His introduction in this novel, not just of specific fairy tale allusions, but of a complete, carefully designed fairy-tale frame-work for the skeleton of the narrative is of great importance because it permits him to depict this basic conflict while investing it with a new significence.

With _Martin Chuzzlewit_, Dickens had, as I have already shown, continued the shift which had begun in _Barnaby Rudge_ away from the plight of innocence in a fallen world to the predicament of fallible adults. Martin's main task was to learn to recognize that his sufferings were the direct outcome of flaws within his own nature. Evil in the novels of the middle period is not so much to be blamed on demonic conspirators who attack from without, but is to be seen, in Spenser's term, as "home-bred."[43] The threat of a fall from innocence, which so obsessed the young Dickens, turns essentially on an encounter between Adam and Satan, the innocent and the demonic, a mythic encounter. In romance, which is, according to Frye, a step closer to the human level than myth,[44] the hero frequently encounters demonic figures with whom he must contend, but as in The Faerie Queene, these can often be interpreted as projections of the hero himself. This, for example is clearly the significance behind the Red Cross Knight's struggle with Orgoglio and with "the man from hell that calls himself Despayre." A similar pattern can frequently be observed in fairy tales, "a sentimentalized form of folk talk."[45] This technique, which dramatizes inner conflict or various aspects of the hero's self by projecting them on to other characters in the work is not, so far as I can see, employed by Dickens in Dombey and Son, although it is a technique which he uses to great effect in subsequent novels like David Copperfield, Bleak House, and Great Expectations. Of more significance for my purposes is the fact that the evil adversaries of the fairy tale are traditionally not the demonic personages of myth or epic, but the more homely figures of ghost, witch, ogre, imp and enchanter. These figures represent a kind of domestication of evil in that they are much less powerful, less dignified, and more familiar than the grand demonic personages of the more exalted genres. That the stock villains of the folk tradition represent a diminution of the power of evil from the level of the demonic is exemplified by Milton's "Nativity Ode." As the powers of hell flee at the coming of the Christ Child, they are described by Milton with all the traditional demonic imagery of fire, darkness, and horror:

> And sullen Moloch, fled,
> Hath left his shadows dread
> His burning idol all of blackest hue;
> In vain with cymbals' ring
> They call the grisly king,
> In dismal dance about the furnace blue;
> The brutish gods of Nile as fast,
> Isis and Orus, and the dog Anubis haste.
>
> Nor is Osiris seen
> In Memphian grove or green,
> Trampling the unshowered grass with lowings loud;
> Nor can he be at rest
> Within his sacred chest;
> Nought but profoundest Hell can be his shroud,
> In vain the timbreled anthems dark
> The sabled stolèd sorcerers bear his worshipped ark.[46]

The triumph of the Messiah is revealed by the modulation of the demonic into the less terrifying world of fairy and folk tale in the poem's serene conclusion. The evil has not disappeared, but it has lost much of its terrifying power:

> The flocking shadows pale
> Troop from th' infernal jail;
> Each fettered ghost slips to his several grave,
> And the yellow-skirted fays
> Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their moon-loved maze.[47]

Fagin and Gashford, especially, in the early novels have an aura of power which links them clearly with the hellish world of the demonic. In Dombey and Son, however, Dickens's reduction of what would have been major devil figures in the earlier novels to the ranks of minor imps and enchanters suggests a perception of evil as something ultimately less awesome, more controllable, and more human than Dickens has previously described. As well, the relation between characters like Mrs. Pipchin, Mrs. Brown, Major Bagstock and Mr. Carker, and Mr. Dombey, hints a greater role for human responsibility in connection with evil.

The evil fairy tale characters in this novel include an ogress, a witch, an imp and an evil enchanter (Mrs. Pipchin, Mrs. Brown, Major Bagstock and Mr. Carker respectively.) I shall develop my arguments for these identifications shortly; for the moment I wish only to call attention to the fact that they all become involved with Mr. Dombey through his own fault. While the devils of the earlier novels tend to attack inexplicably and without provocation, these creatures have entered Dombey's life at his own request. Dombey's is the hubris of one who thinks he can safely employ evil to achieve his own ends, a hubris so complete that he is unable to discern malevolence. Dombey initially perceives all of these characters as useful in carrying out his own schemes. Mrs. Pipchin prepares Paul for Dr. Blimber's Academy; Bagstock introduces him to the higher social plane on which he hopes to acquire a wife; Carker manages his affairs and later, his domestic life; Mrs. Brown helps him track down Carker. Although Dombey's entanglements with all these figures serve to separate him still further from Florence, who is to be the source of his redemption, none of them can be said to corrupt him; they merely encourage him to continue along the destructive path he has already chosen. As Edgar Johnson observes, the villains of Dombey and Son "batten not on the weakness of innocent victims, but on the vices of the powerful. . . . Both the Manager and the blue-faced Major merely smooth a way that everything in Mr. Dombey's background and character predetermines he shall travel."[48] Their role is characteristic of the more complex view of evil which Dickens exhibits in the novels of the middle period in that it highlights the responsibility of the individual for his own sufferings.

Dickens's description of Mrs. Pipchin, into whose hands Paul is delivered by his father in preparation for Dr. Blimber's forcing house, illustrates how an impression of the demonic may be modified by the use of fairy tale imagery:

> This celebrated Mrs. Pipchin was a marvellously ill-favoured, ill-conditioned old lady, of a stooping figure, with a mottled face, like bad marble, a hook nose, and a hard grey eye, that looked as if it might have been hammered at on an anvil without sustaining any injury. Forty years at least had elapsed since the Peruvian mines had been the death of Mr. Pipchin, but his relict still wore black bombazeen, of such a lustreless, deep, dead, sombre shade, that gas itself couldn't light her up after dark, and her presence was a quencher to any number of candles. She was generally spoken of as "a great manager" of children; and the secret of her management was, to give them everything that they didn't like, and nothing that they did--which was found to sweeten their dispositions very much. She was such a bitter old lady, that one was tempted to believe there had been some mistake in the application of the Peruvian machinery, and that all her waters of gladness and milk of human kindness, had been pumped out dry, instead of the mines.
>
> The Castle of this ogress and child-queller was in a steep by-street at Brighton; where the soil was more than usually chalky, flinty and sterile, and the houses were more than usually brittle and thin . . . where snails were constantly discovered holding onto the street doors, and other public places they were not expected to ornament, with the tenacity of cupping glasses. . . . in the window of the front parlour, which was never opened, Mrs. Pipchin kept a collection of plants in pots, which imparted an earthy flavour of their own to the establishment. However choice examples of their kind, too, these plants were of a kind peculiarly suited to the establishment of Mrs. Pipchin. There were a half-a-dozen specimens of the cactus, writhing around bits of lathe, like hairy serpents; another specimen shooting out broad claws, like a green lobster; several creeping vegetables, possessed of sticky and adhesive leaves; and one uncomfortable flower-pot hanging from the ceiling, which appeared to have boiled over, and tickling people underneath with its long green ends, reminded them of spiders--in which Mrs. Pipchin's dwelling was uncommonly prolific, though perhaps it challenged competition still more proudly, in the season, in point of earwigs. (D&S, pp. 99-100)

Although this passage is extremely long, I have chosen to cite it in full because Dickens is doing some things in it which are characteristic of his method throughout much of Dombey and Son. Semi-jocular in tone, the passage purports to be an only slightly exaggerated portrait of a cantankerous old woman. If one begins, however, simply to list the adjectives and images which it contains, one might be startled to discover how powerfully the list suggests Northrop Frye's description of the characteristic images of the world of the demonic. A partial list of the words contained in this passage includes marble, hard, grey, hook, anvil, hammered, mines, black, deep, dead, sombre, bitter, chalky, flinty, sterile, brittle, thin, earthy, snails, cactus, serpents, claws, spiders, earwigs, writhing, creeping. All of these words hint at the demonic world: the desert wasteland, dry, sterile and rocky; the beasts--snakes and other reptiles, insects and predators--which replace the lambs and doves of the innocent world; the hard, metallic or inorganic realm of weapons and machines; the darkness and deadness of the demonic universe. In addition, Mrs. Pipchin's harsh management of children suggests the tyrant of the demonic world, and the reference to the "ogress," the cannibalism which Frye identifies as a demonic parody of the eucharistic feast.[49]

The impression of the demonic, however, which these words potentially suggest, is modified by the tone, which is dryly ironic, and by the presence of other elements which link Mrs. Pipchin with the world of the fairy tale. Mrs. Pipchin is not a devil; a "bitter old lady" with "a stooping figure" and "a hook nose," an "ogress" and "a child-queller" who lives in a "Castle," she is the traditional wicked old witch or ogress of countless folk tales, and as such, she is a figure out of a child's nightmare or story-book, not one to inspire terror on an adult level.

Dickens's description of old Mrs. Brown, which refers to her "shrivelled yellow face" and "shabby little house" into which she "pushes" Florence, even more obviously suggests the witch. The world of the demonic is hinted at in the description of the house:

> They had not gone far, but had gone by some very uncomfortable places, such as the brick-fields and tile-yards, when the old woman turned down a dirty lane, where the mud lay in deep black ruts in the middle of the road. She stopped before a shabby little house, as closely shut up as a house that was full of cracks and crevices could be. Opening the door with a key she took out of her bonnet, she pushed the child before her into a back room, where there was a great heap of rags of different colours lying on the floor; a heap of bones, and a heap of sifted dust or cinders; but there was no furniture at all, and the walls and ceiling were quite black. (D&S, p. 70)

Rags and bones, dust and cinders, bricks and mud, black ruts, black walls, cracks and crevices--once again a suggestion of the sterile wasteland of the demonic world, and once again a diminution of that particular effect, achieved here in part by the qualification of the imagery by words which suggest the homely and the familiar; the dirty lane, the little house, the back room, the bonnet. Mrs. Brown is a terrifying figure, particularly when she "whip[s] out a large pair of scissors, and [falls] into an unaccountable state of excitement" (D&S, p. 71), but the terror is modified by our perception of her as the familiar figure of the witch:

> . . . Mrs. Brown resumed her seat on the bones, and smoked a very short black pipe, mowing and mumbling all the time as if she were eating the stem. (D&S, p. 72)

The world of the fairy tale ("Hansel and Gretel" is clearly evoked) to which Mrs. Brown belongs, is pre-eminently a world of childhood, and it is only on that level that she has any power to frighten or intimidate. She terrorizes young Rob the Grinder by appearing to cast a spell on him:

> The old woman, to the unspeakable dismay of the Grinder, walked

> her twisted figure round and round, in a ring of some four feet in diameter, constantly repeating these words, and shaking her fist above her head, and working her mouth about. (D&S, p. 731)

Her relative powerlessness on an adult level, however, is revealed in the obsequious deference with which she treats Mr. Dombey:

> "It's a poor place for a great gentleman like your worship," said the old woman, curtseying and chattering. (D&S, p. 724)

Mrs. Pipchin and Mrs. Brown are both involved with Mr. Dombey to some extent, but it is really only in relation to children--Paul, Florence and Rob--that they are seen as ogress and witch. There are, however, two other figures in the novel who exercise a malignant influence over Dombey--Bagstock and Carker--and both of these characters are depicted with strong overtones of the demonic. Once again, however, for the reasons I mentioned previously, the demonic implications of the portraits are qualified by a certain aura of the folk and fairy tale.

Major Bagstock, who introduces Dombey to the genteel world of Mrs. Skewton and Edith Granger, is not just an apoplectic, social-climbing busy body. His grotesquely swollen face, which puffs up even more when he is excited, staring eyes, and choked, silent laughter suggest something more sinister. Dickens frequently calls him Mephistophelean, hinting at the demonic quality of his relationship with Dombey. He is not, however, like Fagin, Gashford, or Chester, a grand incarnation of evil, but only a sort of minor imp. He has no power to corrupt the innocent Florence; instead, while pretending like Mephistopheles to serve, he reinforces his victim's self-destructive conduct.

Dombey cannot be saved until he breaks out of the icy prison into which he has shut himself. It is Bagstock's function to see that this does not take place. Immediately after Paul's death, Dombey finds his thoughts turning to his son's questions about the power of money:

> What could it do, his boy had asked him. Sometimes, thinking of the baby question, he could hardly forbear inquiring, himself, what _could_ it do indeed; what had it done? (_D&S_, p. 272)

The Major's influence helps to keep Dombey from pursuing a line of thought which might eventually free him:

> But these were lonely thoughts, bred late at night in the sullen despondency and gloom of his retirement, and pride easily found its reassurance in many testimonies to the truth, as unimpeachable and precious as the Major's. (_D&S_, p. 272)

Bagstock confirms Dombey's deluded belief in his own omnipotence, and discourages any introspection which might lead to the birth of self-knowledge:

> "Dombey," said the Major, rapping on the arm with his cane, "don't be thoughtful. It's a bad habit. Old Joe, Sir, wouldn't be as tough as you see him, if he had ever encouraged it. You are too great a man, Dombey, to be thoughtful. In your position, Sir, you're far above that kind of thing." (_D&S_, p. 283)

Bagstock also encourages Dombey to reject those who would offer him genuine love and fellowship, engineering the expulsion of poor Miss Tox from Dombey's circle, and plotting with Mrs. Skewton to have him marry Edith, in a step which proves disastrous for them both.

The demonic quality of the major is brought out most powerfully in his ability to mimic the characteristics of the redemptive circle of the Wooden Midshipman, an aspect of evil's talent for parody. His gallant exchanges with Cleopatra are a hideous parody of Captain Cuttle's chivalrous attitude towards Florence. Dombey is imprisoned in a dark, cold world, and he turns perhaps, to the "smoke-dried, sun-burnt" (_D&S_, p. 125) old Major who, as Mrs. Skewton remarks with revulsion, "'smell[s] of the sun,'" (_D&S_, p. 367) in an unconscious recognition of his need for human warmth. But the sun imagery with which Bagstock is associated does not suggest the gentle, fostering warmth found, for example, in Polly Toodle's bright face, or the Captain's sunny countenance; it suggests instead the sun as a destroyer. The "heavy mass of indigo" (D&S, p. 126) that is the Major's face suggests the intense heat of a blue flame, a flame that he feeds, Quilp-like, with his love of blistering sauces and condiments. Even Dombey's ultimate redemption by his daughter is parodied to some extent by the Major. Florence breaks the spell that binds her father, but long before this happens, Dombey is taken up by the Major. Prior to the Major's intervention, Dombey is described as being "shut-up within himself . . . rarely, at any time, overstepping the enchanted circle within which the operations of Dombey and Son were conducted" (D&S, p. 285, my italics). Dombey's introduction to Mrs. Skewton's set effects an illusory release from "the enchanted circle," but its ultimate effect is to imprison Dombey even more strongly behind the walls of his own pride.

The major villain of the novel is Mr. Carker. There is some suggestion of the demonic in his characterization, particularly in the scene at Leamington, where he glides, snake-like, in and out of the trees, spying on Edith, like Satan in the garden. I see him, however, in keeping with the fairy-tale pattern of the novel, more as an evil enchanter than a full-fledged devil. It is he, along with Bagstock, who helps maintain the spell on Dombey by flattering his pride and feeding his delusions of greatness, delusions that have the effect of forcing Dombey into deeper and deeper withdrawal. One strand of imagery in the novel strongly suggests the enchanter identification.

The scene at Leamington, mentioned above, describes the Manager as he "threaded the great boles of the trees, and went passing in and out, before this one and behind that, weaving a chain of foot-steps on the dewy ground" (D&S, p. 380). The ritualistic pattern of his steps suggests the casting of a spell over Edith, an implication Dickens perhaps slyly hints at when he has Mrs. Skewton refer to this meeting between her daughter and Carker as "one of the most enchanting coincidences that I ever heard of" (D&S, p. 383).

Carker's servant and spy, the unfortunate Rob, is convinced that his master possesses supernatural powers. Placed in charge of Carker's horse, he cautions Mrs. Brown against touching it: "'He's got a master that would find it out if he was touched with a straw'" (D&S, p. 636). Carker's smile terrifies the boy:

> He could not have quaked more, through his whole being, before the teeth, though he had come into the service of a powerful enchanter, and they had been his strongest spell. (D&S, p. 588)

The enchanter identification, hinted at in the above quoted passage, is suggested again as Rob, trembling with fear, promises to obey Carker, and the Manager takes leave of him with a final warning:

> "I'll try how true and grateful you can be. I'll prove you!" Making this by his display of teeth and by the action of his head, as much a threat as a promise, he turned from Rob's eyes, which were nailed upon him, *as if he had won the boy by a charm, body and soul*. (D&S, p. 312, my italics)

Edith, too, is mesmerized by him. As he gives her his glib account of his role as Dombey's chief aide, "she [is] afraid to take her eyes from his face" (D&S, p. 629).

It is not only characters like Rob and Edith who sense Carker's hidden power. Florence is afraid of him too. Unlike Rob, Edith, and her father, she has little to fear from him in the way of moral danger.

Like Bagstock, Carker is most successful with those whose flawed natures provide him with some leverage. Florence is protected by her own innocence; she cannot be harmed by one whose greatest power lies in his ability to exploit moral weakness. Nevertheless, although her virtue is proof against any attempt at moral corruption, like the similarly incorruptible Nell and Oliver, she can be physically victimized. Carker's plans for her after Paul's death are quite clear; he hopes to gain control of the firm by marrying Dombey's daughter, and Florence, without knowing quite what he intends, is uneasily aware of being the focus of his attention. She perceives him partly as spider-like: "She had no means . . . of freeing herself from the web he was gradually winding about her" (D&S, p. 398), but partly as an enchanter:

> This conduct on the part of Mr. Carker and her habit of often considering it with wonder and uneasiness, began to invest him with an uncomfortable fascination in Florence's thoughts. A more distinct remembrance of his features, voice and manner: which she sometimes courted, as a means of reducing him to the level of a real personage, capable of exerting no greater charm over her than another: did not remove the vague impression. (D&S, p. 399)

A second strand of imagery identifies Carker with the animal world. Most of the imagery is feline:

> The Captain said "Good day" and walked out and shut the door; leaving Mr. Carker still reclining against the chimney-piece. In whose sly look and watchful manner; in whose false mouth, stretched but not laughing; in whose spotless cravat and very whiskers; even in whose silent passing of his soft hand over his white linen and smooth face; there was something desperately cat-like. (D&S, p. 237)

Although the cat imagery is strongly stressed, Carker is also described in imagery suggesting a number of other animals. As he slyly observes the effect upon Dombey of Flo's message conveying her "dear love" to her father, he is pictured as having "a wolf's face . . . with even the hot tongue revealing itself through the stretched mouth" (D&S, p. 365). The snake-like characteristics he exhibits in the grove at Leamington emerge strongly later in the novel as he begins his campaign to seduce Edith Dombey. She watches with helpless fascination while "he unfolded one more ring of the coil into which he had gathered himself" (D&S, p. 629). To the timid Florence, he is "like a scaly monster of the deep [who] swam down below her and kept his shining eye upon her" (D&S, p. 399). He is later "spurned like a reptile" by Edith and has his "fox's hide stripped off" (D&S, p. 766).

The animal imagery is consistent with his predatory nature, symbolized most powerfully by Dickens's insistence on his gleaming white teeth, and most dramatically in the scene at Dijon, where he comes "through the dark rooms, like a mouth" (D&S, p. 757). It can also be seen, however, as complementary to the enchanter imagery discussed above. One familiar characteristic of enchanters and magicians in traditional folk-tales is their ability to change their shapes at will. Sometimes they assume the identity of other human beings, as Archimago does when he disguises himself as the Red Cross Knight;[50] more often than not, however, the change is from human to animal form. One famous "shape shifter" is the giant in "Puss and Boots," who is tricked into changing into a mouse so that Puss can gobble him up.

Carker is ultimately destroyed in a train accident, but as Dickens describes the railway, even that most modern of nineteenth-century technological advances acquires something of the aura of the fairy tale. As Carker watches the train from his window:

> the ground shook, the house rattled, the fierce impetuous rush

> was in the air!
>
> . . . .
>
> A curse upon the fiery devil, thundering along so smoothly, tracked through the distant valley by a glare of light and lurid smoke, and gone. (D&S, p. 776)

That night, Carker is tormented by "the dull light changing to the two red eyes, and the fierce fire dropping glowing coals, and the rush of the giant as it fled past" (D&S, p. 777). When he is finally killed, the last thing he sees before being "beaten down, caught up, and whirled away upon a jagged mill, that spun him round and round, and struck him limb from limb, and licked his stream of life up with its fiery red heat" is the sight of its "red eyes, bleared and dim, in the day light, close upon him" (D&S, p. 741). The wicked enchanter finally meets his doom at the hands of a fiery dragon.

I have analysed the fairy tale quality of the villains of the novel at some length in order to demonstrate Dickens's reduction of the demonic to the less awesome, more human world of the fairy tale, a reduction which seems to me to imply a movement away from what Graham Greene saw as Dickens's Manichean tendency[51] to depict evil as an external, independent principle, essentially beyond human control. (That it is beyond human control in the early novels, is implied by the need to save the innocent by removing him from the wicked world which is evil's domain.) But if this technique can be said in some ways to diminish the ultimate power of evil, it must also be said to increase the burden of human responsibility. In the earlier novels, the death or defeat of the villain usually releases the hero to enter the safe world of the unfallen, but such is not the case in Dombey and Son. The evil that oppresses Dombey does not originate with Carker, nor is Dombey released by Carker's death. Dombey is not an innocent suddenly beset by evil forces, to be magically rescued in the nick of time by being carried off to an innocent paradise. He is an adult protagonist who has chosen a course of action for which he must assume responsibility.

Dombey's nature is a given; there is no suggestion anywhere in the novel of his having undergone some sort of fall:

> In all his life, he had never made a friend. His cold and distant nature had neither sought one, nor found one. (D&S, p. 47)

Characters whose natures are established from the outset as either good or evil are, of course, a staple of Dickens's fiction, particularly in the early novels, but while no attempt is made to account for Dombey's life-denying attitudes, the fact that he eventually renounces and overcomes them is a fact of some importance.

Dombey's sin, and I find this particularly interesting in view of the fascination with death implied in some of the early novels, is his denial of life. The basic conflict in this novel is not so much between innocence and the demonic, or even good and evil, as between life and death. Dickens presents us with the conflict by subtly playing off one group of images against another. An image cluster involving light, warmth and moisture is set against another indicating darkness, coldness and dryness, and these sets of oppositions pick up a certain archetypal resonance from the fairy tale context in which they are embedded.

The darkness, dryness and coldness are associated with Dombey and his satellites. He lives in a dark and gloomy mansion which, in another fairy tale allusion, Dickens explicitly links with the enchanted palace of Sleeping Beauty:

> No magic dwelling place, shut up in the heart of a thick wood, was ever more solitary and deserted to the fancy, than was her father's mansion in its grim reality, as it stood lowering on the street: always by night, when lights were shining from neighbouring windows, a blot upon its scanty brightness; always by day, a frown upon its never-smiling face. (D&S, p. 319)

It is not enchanted sleep, however, but death itself which wraps this house in gloom and solitude:

> The spell upon it was more wasting than the spell that used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time, but left their waking freshness unimpaired.
>
> The passive desolation of disuse was everywhere silently manifest about it. Within doors, curtains, drooping heavily, lost their old folds and shapes, and hung like cumbrous palls. Hecatombs of furniture, still piled and covered up, shrunk like imprisoned and forgotten men, and changed insensibly. Mirrors were dim as with the breath of years. Patterns of carpets faded and became perplexed and faint, like the memory of those years' trifling incidents. Boards, starting at unwonted footsteps, creaked and shook. Keys rusted in the locks of doors. Damp started on the walls, and as the stains came out, the pictures seemed to go in and secrete themselves. Mildew and mould began to lurk in closets. Fungus trees grew in corners of the cellars. Dust accumulated, nobody knew whence nor how; spiders, moths and grubs were heard of everyday. An exploratory blackbeetle now and then was found immovable upon the stairs, or in an upper room, as wondering how he got there. Rats began to squeak and scuffle in the night time, through dark galleries they mined behind the panelling. (D&S, p. 319)

More tomb than house, it is set in the midst of a blighted garden "where two gaunt trees, with blackened trunks and branches, rattled rather than rustled" (D&S, p. 21), and filled with furniture shrouded in "great winding sheets." Each chandelier is muffled in a holland bag so that it "looked like a monstrous tear depending from the ceiling's eye" (D&S, p. 22). The house is full of the smell of the grave: "odours, as from vaults and damp places, came out of the chimneys" (D&S, p. 22).

As Florence spends her days wandering through the deserted rooms, "the cold walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone"

(D&S, p. 320), but the source of the death-like atmosphere of the house, with its "black, cold rooms," and empty hearths with their "stiff and stark fire-arms" (D&S, p. 52) is Dombey himself. As he stands "frigidly watching his little daughter," the air "becomes, or might have become, colder and colder" (D&S, p. 52). The sun shuns him: "if any sunbeam stole into the room to light the children at their play, it never reached his face" (D&S, 52). One glance from him is enough to freeze the warm tears on Florence's cheek (D&S, p. 30), and the chill that sets the mark of death on little Paul at his christening emanates from the child's father:

> There was a toothache in everything. The wine was so bitter cold that it forced a little scream from Miss Tox, which she had great difficulty in turning into a "Hem!" The veal had come from such an airy pantry, that the first taste of it had struck a sensation as of cold lead to Mr. Chick's extremities. Mr. Dombey alone remained unmoved. He might have been hung up for sale at a Russian fair as a specimen of a frozen gentleman. (D&S, p. 57)

Dombey thinks he loves his son, but his frozen heart can only respond to the child by attempting to drag the boy down into the icy depths of the father's being:

> . . . When that nature concentrated its whole force so strongly on a partial scheme of parental interest and ambition, it seemed as if its icy current, instead of being released by this influence, and running clear and free, had thawed for but an instant to admit its burden, and then frozen with it into one unyielding block. (D&S, p. 47)

The imagery which Dickens uses to express Dombey's emotional nature: "a specimen of a frozen gentleman," and "one unyielding block of ice," suggests not only his inhuman coldness, but an impenetrably hard exterior by which Dombey seeks to armour himself against all personal relationships. Dombey fears love (and thus rejects Florence) because he fears the giving up of self which love involves. He can only bear to relate to others by subduing their wills to his. His second marriage (entered into as a commercial transaction--he buys a potential mother for the son he hopes will replace Paul) is a contest of wills. Paul's birth is regarded as a supremely important event because it seems to guarantee the power of Dombey and Son for another generation, and the firm itself is important because it generates the money which is the principal instrument of power in the world that Dombey inhabits.

Dombey's need for power, and his conviction that it is conferred by money, is illustrated in his conversation with Paul when Walter comes to plead for his uncle:

> "If you had the money now," said Mr. Dombey, "as much money as young Gay has talked about; what would you do?"
> "Give it to his old uncle," returned Paul.
> "Lend it to his old uncle, eh?" retorted Mr. Dombey. "Well! When you are old enough, you know, you will share my money, and we shall use it together."
> "Dombey and Son," interrupted Paul, who had been tutored in the phrase.
> "Dombey and Son," repeated his father, "Would you like to begin to be Dombey and Son, now, and lend this money to young Gay's uncle?"
> "Oh! if you please, Papa!" said Paul, "and so would Florence."
> "Girls," said Mr. Dombey, "have nothing to do with Dombey and Son. Would _you_ like it?"
> "Yes, Papa, yes!"
> "Then you shall do it," returned his father.
>
> . . . .
>
> "You see, Paul," he added, dropping his voice, "how powerful money is, and how anxious people are to get it. Young Gay comes all this way to beg for money, and you, who are so grand and great, having got it, are going to let him have it, as a great favour and obligation." (_D&S_, p. 133)

Dombey uses money to organize relationships on a completely impersonal basis, as his interview with Polly Toodle reveals:

> "It is not at all in this bargain that you need to become attached to my child, or that my child need become attached to you . . . When you go away from here, you will have concluded what is a mere matter of bargain and sale, hiring and letting: and you will stay away. The child will cease to remember you; and you will cease, if you please, to remember the child." (_D&S_, p. 16)

(His insistence, by the way, that Polly be known as Mrs. Richards, "an ordinary name" with no particular significance or meaning, is an example of the gratuitous exercise of power.)

Money not only gives Dombey the power to deny human bonds, he also believes that it can confer immunity against what the Prayer Book calls "the changes and chances of this fleeting world," and he is filled with a sense of outrage and sullen incomprehension when events elude his control. The death of his first wife fills him with "angry sorrow," and his son's ominous susceptibility to the normal childhood diseases moves him to question, "in his haughty manner, now and then, what Nature meant by it" (D&S, p. 90). When young Paul questions him about the meaning of money, Dombey initially insists that "money . . . can do anything" (D&S, p. 92). But when Paul asks why money then could not save his mother, Dombey grudgingly admits that "money, though a very potent spirit, never to be disparaged on any account whatever, could not keep people alive whose time had come to die" and that "we must all die, unfortunately, even in the city" (D&S, p. 93). The interjected "unfortunately" and the tacked-on "even in the city" (the financial world of London) show how deeply reluctant Dombey is to admit the existence of any limitations on his power to order and control.

The insane arrogance that refuses to accept the fact of man's mortality, and which tries to see death itself as something ultimately amenable to human control, is characteristic of all those who share Dombey's values. His sister attributes the death of Paul's mother to a lack of will power; when her husband tells her that "'we're here one day and gone the next,'" "Mrs. Chick content[s] herself with a glance of reproof," and then goes on to moralize:

> "I hope this heart-rending occurrence will be a warning to all of us to accustom ourselves to rouse ourselves, and to make efforts in time where they're required of us. There's a moral in everything, if we would only avail ourselves of it. It will be our own fault if we lose sight of this one." (D&S, p. 11)

Major Bagstock prevents Dombey from perceiving the grisly lesson of Mrs. Skewton's collapse by telling him:

> ". . . some people will die. They will do it. Damme, they will. They're obstinate. I tell you what, Dombey, it may not be ornamental: it may not be refined; it may be rough and tough; but a little of the genuine old English Bagstock stamina, Sir, would do all the good in the world to the human breed." (D&S, p. 573)

Paradoxically, it is because Dombey struggles so hard to deny death that he leads a life which is a living death. The same iron will that seeks to shut out death, also shuts out life, as Keats shows in the "Ode on Melancholy":

> But when the melancholy fit shall fall
> Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
> That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
> And hides the green hill in an April shroud:
> Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
> Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
> Or on the wealth of globed peonies;[52]

The attitude expressed here must be distinguished from that morbid fascination with death which some critics have noted in The Old Curiosity Shop. The speaker of the "Ode" accepts death as part of the totality of life, but Dombey, by resisting death, shuts himself up in a cold dark world that is really the grave. He is ultimately seen by Paul as Death himself. As Dombey sits watching by the death-bed of his son, the child fails to recognize him, seeing only:

> a figure with its head upon its hand [which] returned so often, and remained so long, and sat so still and solemn, never speaking, never being spoken to, and rarely lifting up its face, that Paul began to wonder languidly, if it were real; and in the night-time saw it sitting there, with fear. (D&S, p. 222)

Dombey's affinity with the world of death into which he tries to drag young Paul is expressed, as I have noted, by imagery of darkness, dryness, and cold, and the establishments of those whom he selects to assist him with Paul's education are similarly characterized. Mrs. Pipchin habitually wears widow's weeds "of such a lustreless, deep, dead, sombre hue that gas itself couldn't light her up" (D&S, p. 99). Her house, as I have also noted, is filled with desert plants and set in "chalky, flinty, sterile" soil. Blimber's Academy, where "every description of Greek and Latin vegetables was got off the driest twigs of boys, under the frostiest circumstances" (D&S, p. 141) sees Paul placed under the direct supervision of Miss Cornelia Blimber, a woman who is "dry and sandy with working in the graves of dead languages," and who instructs Paul in a "cool little sitting room . . . with some books in it, but no fire" (D&S, p. 160).

Paul eventually escapes from his father's world of death by literally dying, but not before Dickens has hinted very strongly that Paul, had he lived, might have inherited not only the family business, but the self-isolating and life-denying hauteur that goes with it:

> His temper gave abundant promise of being imperious in after-life; and he had as hopeful an appreciation of his own importance, and the rightful subservience of all other things to it, as heart could desire. . . . They were the strangest pair . . . that ever firelight shone upon. Mr. Dombey so erect and solemn, gazing at the blaze; his little image, with an old, old, face, peering into the red perspective with the fixed and rapt attention of a sage. Mr. Dombey entertaining complicated worldly schemes and plans; his little image entertaining Heaven knows what wild fancies, half-formed thoughts, and wandering speculations. Mr. Dombey still with starch and arrogance; the little image by inheritance, and in unconscious imitation. (D&S, pp. 91-92)

In this passage Dickens hints at a double source of potential corruption for Paul. One is education or nurture, suggested by the child's "unconscious imitation" of his father, and further developed by the stress laid on the life-denying qualities in Pipchin's and Blimber's educational schemes, with their rejection of all that nourishes fancy and imagination. The second, however, has more to do with nature: the assertion that Paul's stiffness of attitude comes from his father "by inheritance." In *Martin Chuzzlewit* the hero's flaws are attributed to his faulty education, but in *Dombey and Son*, although Dickens is careful not to let the idea of Paul's corruption develop beyond the realm of mere potentiality, there is at least some indication of a movement away from the original belief in innate innocence which was so important in the early novels. Those novels insist not only on the original innocence of the child, but on his incorruptibility as well, as revealed in the temptation-proof natures of Nell and Oliver. The stress on education in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and the ability of outside influences to pervert and mislead the innocent in *Barnaby Rudge* suggest a weakening of that faith. The passage from *Dombey and Son* which I have just quoted indicates perhaps a movement toward the more pessimistic notion of an inherited fall: original sin, in other words. The idea is barely developed in this novel, but it is, nevertheless, at least implied in this scene, and will become a concept of much greater importance in later novels like *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*.

Dickens's description of Mr. Dombey's largely self-inflicted suffering, and of his subsequent recognition of the role he has played in the creation of his own misery is a fuller treatment of a theme that began to interest Dickens at least as far back as *Barnaby Rudge* (and some, remembering Dick Swiveller, might say as far back as *The Old Curiosity Shop*), while the fairy-tale treatment of the villains in this novel, by diminishing their demonic identity, further develops the idea of evil as something of human, rather than hellish, origin. This does not mean, however, that Dickens lost all interest in innocence. Dombey and Son contains not just one innocent, but a whole community of of them. Their role, however, is not merely to survive as innocents, but, through Florence, to effect the redemption of Dombey, and as a group, to sustain and support one another. Like Pickwick, they can be said to embody a moral ideal, but in their case the ideal is not so much simple innocence, as it is a complex of life-affirming values which stand in opposition to the life-denying values which Dombey represents.

P The group which clusters around the Wooden Midshipman and which includes Sol Gills, Polly Toodle, Walter Gay, Susan Nipper, Toots, and above all, Captain Cuttle and Florence is associated with imagery of light, warmth, and tears. Sun imagery is most often used by Dickens to express both the light and the warmth which opposes Dombey's darkness and cold. The owner of the Wooden Midshipman, the appropriately named Sol Gills, has "eyes as red as if they had been small suns looking at you through a fog" (D&S, p. 34). The rest of the description stresses Gill's innocent vision:

> [He has] a newly awakened manner, such as he might have acquired by staring successively through every optical instrument in his shop, and suddenly come back to the world again, to find it green. (D&S, p. 34)

His nephew Walter is a bright-faced boy whose ambition is to become "a Post-Captain with epaulettes of insupportable brightness" (D&S, p. 111). Polly Toodle, who comes to the shop to take charge of the domestic arrangements before Florence's wedding, is sunlike in her ability to impart "a partial thaw" to Dombey's chilly rooms (D&S,

p. 160), while Captain Cuttle, next to Florence, is the most sunlike of all. When Gills returns from his wanderings, Cuttle is so overjoyed to see his old friend, that "that sun, his face, broke out once more, shining on all beholders with extraordinary brilliancy" (D&S, p. 800).

Florence's association with the sun is the most marked of all. Her presence lightens Dombey's dark house:

> Florence stole into these rooms at twilight, early in the morning, and at times when meals were served downstairs. And although they were in every nook the better and brighter for her care, she entered and passed out as quietly as any sunbeam, excepting that she left her light behind. (D&S, p. 321)

As she embraces her dying brother, "the golden light came streaming in, and fell upon them, locked together" (D&S, p. 225). After the collapse of his firm, Dombey sees his situation as one of eternal darkness; "for the night of his ruin, there was no tomorrow's sun" (D&S, p. 339), and retreats behind shuttered windows and closed blinds. Florence appears before him as the light bearer when he has lost all hope, when even his personal identity has disappeared in the anonymity of "it."

> It sat down, with its eyes upon the empty fireplace, and as it had lost itself in thought there shone into the room a gleam of light; a ray of sun. It was quite unmindful, and sat thinking. Suddenly it rose, with a terrible face, and that guilty hand grasping what was in its breast. Then it was arrested by a cry--a wild, loud, piercing, loving, rapturous cry--and he only saw his own reflection in the glass, and at his knees, his daughter! (D&S, p. 843)

Restored to humanity by her presence ("it" becomes "he") and a sense of his own identity ("he saw his own reflection in the glass") he begs her forgiveness--"and there was not a sound in all the house for a long, long time; they remained clasped in one another's arms in the glorious sunshine that had crept in with Florence" (D&S, p. 845). One of Captain Cuttle's names for Florence, "Bright Di'mond," sums up the imagery of light associated with her, and perhaps suggests most clearly what her symbolic role in the novel is. Like Arthur's diamond shield in The Faerie Queene, she represents the grace that redeems others, and the fairy tale structure of the novel provides a romantic background in which the reader can more readily accept the semi-allegorical rendering of such concepts.

The ready tears of the Wooden Midshipman constellation suggest spontaneous sympathy and love, in contrast to Dombey's frozen dryness. Florence is particularly prone to tears, but so are Sol Gills, Walter, Polly Toodle, Susan Nipper, Toots and Captain Cuttle. The tears are generally an expression of sympathy for some one else's suffering, or a token of joy. Sol "sobbed aloud" (D&S, p. 116) at the prospect of losing his shop in an execution, mostly because it ruins his chances of "trying to do something for Wally" (D&S, p. 121), and Walter "burst into tears" as he recounted his uncle's plight to Captain Cuttle. Toots "blubbered" (D&S, p. 251) with sympathy for Flo's bereavement, and honest Polly, fetched to Paul's bedside by Susan Nipper, "shed tears to see her and to hear what she said" (D&S, p. 221). Susan laughs and sobs simultaneously at being reunited with her mistress (D&S, p. 781), and Cuttle, informed of Walter's probable death, reads the Burial Service for him, "stopping now and then to wipe his eyes" (D&S, p. 470).

Julian Moynahan, in his article, "Wet versus Dry,"[53] has great fun mocking the proclivity to tears of Florence and her companions. While I cannot accept his notion that Florence represents some sort of damp angel of death, trying to drag her father down into the noise and clammy fellowship of the redeemed, I think it is true to say that Dombey's inability to shed tears is an important symbol of his spiritual malaise, and that his redemption must involve weeping, as in fact, it does:

> He felt her draw his arms about her neck; he felt her put her own round his; he felt her kisses on his face; he felt her wet cheek laid against his own; he felt--oh, how deeply!--all that he had done. (D&S, p. 844)

It is Florence's tears, ritualistically shed on Dombey's hands and face, that heal him.

Dombey and Son concludes with a vision of Mr. Dombey, Florence and a second little Paul safe beside the shores of the life-giving sea. Once again, the protagonist of a Dickens's novel is whisked off to safety at the conclusion of the work to enjoy a world of innocence and bliss, but the fairy tale quality of the ending ought not to blind us to the fact that Dombey has not been presented to us as an innocent child, but as a fallen adult who has had to confess, not only his personal responsibility for the suffering of himself and others, but his need for forgiveness as well, a theme that will assume much greater importance in later novels like Bleak House and Little Dorrit. Before Florence comes to him with her tears and her light, Dombey is depicted reflecting on the past and his own responsibility for it:

> He was fallen, never to be raised up any more. For the night of his worldly ruin there was no to-morrow's sun; for the stain of his domestic shame there was no purification. Nothing, thank Heaven, could bring his dead child back to life. But that which he might have made so different in all the Past--which might have made the Past itself so different, though this he hardly thought of now--that which was his own work, that which he could so easily have wrought into a blessing, and had set himself so steadily for years to form into a curse: that was the sharp grief of his soul.
>
> Oh! He did remember it! The rain that fell upon the roof, the wind that mourned outside the door that night, had had foreknowledge in their melancholy sound. He knew, now, what he had done. He knew, now, that he had called down that upon his head, which bowed it lower than the heaviest stroke of fortune. He knew, now, what it was to be rejected and deserted; now, when

> every loving blossom he had withered in his innocent daughter's heart was snowing down in ashes on him. (D&S, p. 839, my italics)

Not only must Dombey experience the recognition of what he has done and accept responsibility for it, he must also make a clear act of contrition, acknowledging his need for forgiveness:

> As she came closer to him, in another burst of tears, he kissed her on the lips, and lifting up his eyes, said, "O my God, forgive me, for I need it very much!" (D&S, p. 844)

The themes of repentence, redemption and forgiveness are developed in much greater detail in Dicken's later novels, but their appearance in Dombey and Son is a foreshadowing of what is to come.

David Copperfield

The novels of Dickens's middle period, as I have argued in my discussions of Martin Chuzzlewit and Dombey and Son, are important because they reveal a significant shift in the focus of Dickens's interest. In his continuing quest to understand the operation of evil in relation to its human victims, he tends, at this time, to move away from the depiction of archetypal conflicts between wholly innocent child-victims and utterly diabolical villains to concentrate on the predicament of adult figures, like Martin or Mr. Dombey, who, neither innocent nor deliberately wicked, must learn to recognize and to make amends for their flawed natures. The early numbers of David Copperfield suggest a return to the morally simpler world of the early novels. Once again, as in Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop, a helpless little child is thrust out into a threatening environment populated by ogres.

In spite of the superficial echo of the pattern of the earlier works, there are major differences. The "innocence" of young David is not presented as the inherent sanctity of either an Oliver or a Nell, but is clearly shown instead, in much more psychologically realistic terms, to be based upon childhood's natural egocentricity and ignorance. The villains, too, are much more complex. Not only does Dickens make some attempt to give them much clearer psychological motives for their activities than anything he attributes to Fagin or Quilp, he also suggests that in many instances the evil that David perceives or senses in his antagonists is a reflection or psychological projection of repressed aspects of David himself.

The novels from Pickwick to Barnaby Rudge (if one excludes Nickleby) all concern themselves, as I have shown, with protagonists whose main characteristic is a static innocence, characters who do not change or grow to any significant extent in the course of their sufferings, characters whose main task is, in fact, to survive the encounter with evil unchanged. In David Copperfield, however, attention is focused less on the confrontation with evil itself than on the growth of David's character in response to that experience. Various critics of the novel have identified the theme of David Copperfield as "the undisciplined heart,"[54] the battle between "craft and innocence,"[55] or as an indictment of the mores and ideals of Victorian society.[56] I would argue, however, that the major unifying theme of the work revolves around David's struggle to understand who he is in relation to what happens to him,[57] that the novel essentially presents a quest for identity, as Dickens moves beyond the conflict between innocence and the demonic which had so deeply concerned him earlier to investigate the processes which shape human character and identity.

Some aspects of this question had engaged him earlier, as witnessed by the famous "changes of heart" of both Chuzzlewit and Dombey, but Copperfield remains Dickens's first major attempt to provide his readers with a fully articulated analysis of the development of character and the emergence of identity from childhood to maturity.

Before moving on to a more detailed discussion of David Copperfield, I should like to pause briefly to consider a definition of the concept of identity in psychological terms. The relationship between childhood and an adult sense of self has received considerable attention in recent years from researchers in the fields of child-psychiatry and psychology, but as one reads Copperfield, one is struck by the extent to which Dickens, with his intuitive grasp of the psychology of childhood, has anticipated their findings.[58] One of the most important twentieth-century writers in this field is Erik H. Erikson, whose book, Childhood and Society,[59] focuses specifically on the emergence of self-hood. I shall use an Eriksonian model as a framework for the discussion of David Copperfield, not because I feel that Dickens's insights require outside validation, but because Erikson sets out in compact form a useful outline of the processes which Dickens investigates in his novel.

The experience described by religious writers as the fall can also of course be understood as a universal psychological event. The infant, with his delusions of omnipotence and his inability to distinguish between the self and the external world, initially inhabits a kind of innocent paradise which he must eventually and inevitably forfeit. The nostalgia for the lost paradise is a universal human phenomenon, recorded in most cultures in their legends of a golden age of unity and power, and experienced on the individual level as a vague but haunting sense of loss. If the personality of the child as he emerges from infancy is not to be crippled by "a powerful sense of having been deprived, of having been divided, and of having been abandoned,"[60] his first steps into the world of the not-me must be surrounded with a love which gives rise to feelings of trust and confidence, not only in the benevolence of the world around him, but in himself, in his own worth and ability. It is essential, according to Erikson, that the child develop a "sense of inner goodness:" "From the sense of goodness emanates autonomy and pride, from the sense of badness, doubt and shame."[61]

If the sense of inner goodness is damaged, the child may fail to acquire what Erikson calls "ego identity," and defines as the ability "to experience one's self as something that has continuity and sameness."[62] In other words, he will experience difficulty in connecting the person he is today with the person he was yesterday. Although mentally capable of remembering his past, he may be unable to assimilate it or understand it. Discussing the case of a schizophrenic child whose disturbance apparently originated with an abrupt and traumatic separation from her mother, for which the child blamed herself, Erikson stresses the importance of "helping the child to integrate time and establish a continuity of the various selves which had done different things at different times."[63] The child who fails to achieve this kind of integration will, he says, tend to experience himself as a helpless victim of fate, and his own existence as a series of discontinuous fragments. It is interesting to observe, in view of the role of memory in David Copperfield, that Erikson's therapy for the child involved encouraging her in an imaginative reconstruction of her past experiences. As Geoffrey Thurley's comments on the role of memory in Copperfield indicate, reconstruction of the past plays a similar role in that novel:

> Dickens . . . remembers with a vibrancy which wholly transforms the objects of memory into subjects: he moves back and forth, into and out of his story, now freezing the action in order to place himself as he was then in relation to the self he is manifesting now, now merging into past self, now withdrawing from himself as he writes of those earlier apparitions.[64]

In particular, Thurley draws attention to the shifts into the present tense, as David deliberately places himself in the past as if it were present in a technique which suggests how memory can be used "to marshall the several selves of which the present self is compacted."[65]

Not every child who fails to develop the capacity to integrate himself with his past will necessarily become schizophrenic, nor do I mean to suggest that Dickens's portrait of young David should be read as a study in pathology. According to Erikson, however, even the "normal" child may fail in his quest for maturity if his sense of ego-identity is weak. He may, without suffering anything as drastic as psychosis, find himself locked into a regressive pattern in which he spends his life neurotically struggling to recapture the sense of wholeness he knew in infancy, not realizing that the wholeness he seeks is not something he left behind, but something which grows out of the whole pattern of encounters and relationships that make up his life.

The pattern which Erikson has identified, a pattern in which an early assault upon a child's sense of self-worth leads to feelings of helplessness and to a compulsive quest for the lost, "good" self describes the essential pattern of David Copperfield. In outline, the novel describes David as a child whose transition from the self-centered, secure world of early childhood to the more difficult world beyond is made extraordinarily painful through the interference of Mr. Murdstone. By convincing David that he is "bad," Murdstone, in effect, cuts David off from his psychic roots and the boy in consequence spends the greater part of his later life unable (to use Erikson's phrase) "to integrate time and to establish a continuity of the various selves which had done different things at different times." Overwhelmed by a sense of impotence, David, long past childhood, tends to see himself as the passive victim, one to whom things happen, rather than one who makes things happen. As he wearily remarks when yet another calamity befalls him, "Here was another earthquake of which I became the sport" (DC, p. 591).

Most of David's life consists of futile and pathetic efforts to recapture his lost childhood. Only when he finally arrives at a clear, if belated, recognition of the fragmentary nature of his existence can he begin the painful process of integrating himself with his past. The autobiography which the novel represents and which David stresses is meant for no eyes but his own, is obviously intended to serve some personal end. By delving, frequently with a painful reluctance, into his memory, Copperfield attempts to reconstruct the events of his past in order to arrive at some understanding of them and of himself. By forcing himself to recognize that the I who surveys the wounds of long ago is the same I who experienced them, David achieves some measure of healing.

The process of personal integration, however, as depicted in

David Copperfield is never fully completed. The integrated or autonomous personality, according to one definition, is not just one who has learned to perceive the self as possessing continuity and sameness; there must also be evidence of a capacity for self-control, willingness to acknowledge need for others, and an ability to assume responsibility for one's own acts and their consequences.[66] David, by the end of the novel, has achieved some of these goals. He has, by writing his autobiography, assimilated his past. In repudiating "the undisciplined heart" he has learned the virtue of self-control, and, in turning to Agnes, acknowledges his need for others. Where he remains deficient lies in the area of responsibility. Where the heroes of the later novels, like Pip and Eugene Wrayburn ultimately achieve a clear recognition of the part their own behaviour has played in the disasters which befall them, David never fully achieves any such insight.

I should like now to turn to a more detailed application of the Eriksonian model. Near the very end of the novel, a bereaved David gradually realizes that he is mourning far more than the actual deaths of his wife and friend:

> The desolate feeling with which I went abroad deepened and widened hourly. At first it was a heavy sense of loss and sorrow, wherein I could distinguish little else. By imperceptible degrees it became a hopeless consciousness of all that I had lost--love, friendship, interest; of all that had been shattered--my first trust, my first affection, the whole airy castle of my life; of all that remained--a ruined blank and waste, lying wide around me, unbroken, to the dark horizon. (DC, p. 813)

David's perception of the fragmentary quality of his life, "of all that had been shattered," is clearly precipitated by the deaths of Dora and Steerforth but the origins of disintegration lie in his earliest childhood experiences. Unlike Oliver, David has experienced a brief period as the adored and petted centre of a paradisal world inhabited by himself, his mother and his nurse.[67] He recalls that world as an Edenic garden:

> Now I am in the garden at the back . . . a very preserve of butterflies, as I remember it, with a high fence, and a gate and padlock; where the fruit clusters on the trees, riper and richer than fruit has ever been since, in any other garden. (DC, p. 15)

Within the apparent security of that walled and locked garden he has already begun to make his first distinctions between the self and others before Murdstone makes his appearance:

> The first objects that assume a distinct presence before me, as I look far back, into the blank of my infancy, are my mother with her pretty hair and youthful shape, and Peggotty, with no shape at all, and eyes so dark they seemed to darken the whole neighbourhood in her face. (DC, p. 13)

This initial experience of separation, however, takes place in an atmosphere of love and support in which the child hears himself described as "my precious treasure, the dearest little fellow that ever was" (DC, p. 20), and in which his budding accomplishments receive enthusiastic praise:

> "Now let me hear some more about the Crorkindills," said Peggotty, who was not quite right in the name yet, "for I an't heard half enough." (DC, p. 17)

But David's still-developing "sense of goodness," his faith in himself and the world around him is abruptly destroyed by the appearance of Mr. Murdstone, as what should have been a gradual and gentle separation from his mother becomes a sudden and traumatic event. Returning from a visit to Yarmouth, he learns that his mother has remarried in his absence and that an interloper has taken his place in his mother's bedroom and, he fears, in her heart as well. As David surveys his world from the small attic room to which he has been exiled, he begins to experience the new reality of a flawed and shrunken environment:

> I went up there, hearing the dog in the yard bark after me all the way, while I climbed the stairs; and, looking as blank and strange upon the room as the room looked upon me, sat down with my small hands crossed and thought.
>
> I thought of the oddest things. Of the shape of the room, of the cracks in the ceiling, of the paper on the wall, of the flaws in the window glass making ripples and dimples on the prospect, of the washing stand being ricketty on its three legs, and having a discontented something about it, which reminded me of Mrs. Gummidge under the influence of the old one. (DC, p. 44)

David's description of his new room, remote from the rest of the house and furnished with shabby cast-offs in varying states of decrepitude, metaphorically suggests the abrupt alteration in the child's perception of reality. Expelled from the pristine and secure garden of his pre-Murdstone existence, he sees in the room, with its cracked ceiling, flawed glass and ricketty washstand which somehow reminds him of Mrs. Gummidge, a symbolic reflection of his own condition. He knows intuitively that now he too, like Mrs. Gummidge, is fated to be "a lone, lorn creetur," that he must now inhabit a "ricketty," "cracked," disintegrating world,[68] able to glimpse the lost garden of infancy only through the distorting panes of memory. The flawed window-glass which distorts his perceptions of external reality also serves to express the sense of isolation and separation which he is now to endure: able to see, but not to touch, his mother during the ordeal of family prayers, communicating with Peggotty through a keyhole, sitting alone in his room listening to the sounds of other children playing below on the green.

Mr. Murdstone's intrusion into the garden world on the other side of the hedge not only destroys that world for David, it also shatters his sense of himself. The David of the first few chapters is secure in his knowledge of who he is, and has a child's faith in the benevolence of the world. He knows that he is Davy, "the dearest little fellow that ever was," a good and clever child who moves through his lessons as on "a path of flowers" (DC, p. 53). His home, he recalls, had been "my nest [where] my mother was my comforter and friend" (DC, p. 41). Murdstone changes all that. The sunny garden becomes a frozen waste where "the shrubs . . . droop[ed] their heads in the cold" (DC, p. 42), his home becomes terrifyingly unfamiliar territory through which he creeps, vainly attempting to "find anything that was like itself" (DC, p. 43), and his mother, his "comforter and friend," is forced into the role of silent and helpless spectator to her son's misery. Worst of all, David begins to experience a bewildering sense of uncertainty about who and what he is. The child whose sense of self-worth was such that he accepted the deference of the Peggottys with an amusingly matter-of-fact complacency is now forced to make a drastic revision of his own opinion of himself. As one of the "swarm of little vipers" (DC, p. 55) the Murdstones judge all children to be, David now begins to see himself as both wicked and stupid. Lessons become a "grievous daily drudgery and misery" (DC, p. 53), forcing him to concede that "I am very stupid" (DC, p. 54).

Everything that had gone to make up David's sense of himself is relentlessly torn away from him: his mother's love, his home, his self-confidence, his very name, even, at one point, his perception of himself as a human being. As he struggles during a beating, he accidentally bites Mr. Murdstone's hand:

> How well I remember, when my smart and passion had begun to cool,

> how wicked I began to feel!
>
> . . . My stripes were sore and stiff and made me cry afresh when I moved; but they were nothing to the guilt I felt. It lay heavier on my breast than if I had been the most atrocious criminal. (DC, p. 58)

David's sense of self is not yet sufficiently developed for him to resist Murdstone's devastating attacks, not only on his person, but his ego. This episode is similar in effect to Miss Barbary's birthday diatribe to Esther; it instills in the child a deep-rooted conviction of his own inherent wickedness and worthlessness, and like Esther's, much of David's activity in the novel will be devoted to attempting to evade or suppress that knowledge.

The fragmentation of David's self and his uncertainty about his identity is dramatically reflected in his confusion over his name which takes place in the course of his journey to London:

> "Is that the little gentleman from Blunderstone?"
>
> "Yes, ma'am," I said.
>
> "What name?" inquired the lady.
>
> "Copperfield, ma'am," I said.
>
> "That won't do," returned the lady. "Nobody's dinner is paid for here, in that name."
>
> "Is it Murdstone, ma'am?" I said.
>
> "If you're Master Murdstone," said the lady, "why do you go and give another name, first?" (DC, p. 66)

When he finally arrives at the booking office in the city, nobody claims him under either name (DC, p. 72). At last, after the child has sat for some time wondering forlornly whether he will be permitted to sleep on one of the wooden bins "with the other luggage" (DC, p. 72), he is collected by one of the masters who identifies him simply as "the new boy" (DC, p. 73). "Davy," "the precious treasure," "the dearest little fellow that ever was" has become a nameless being,[69] an object to be lumped in "with the other luggage" and "left till called for" (DC, p. 72).

But worse is yet to come. When he arrives at Mr. Creakle's Academy he is startled to see a large placard proclaiming, "Take care of him. He bites" (DC, p. 78). Convinced that there must be "a great dog" somewhere in the vicinity, he seeks refuge on top of a desk, only to be told that the placard is for him: "I recollect that I positively began to have a dread of myself, as a kind of wild boy who did bite" (DC, p. 79). The placard, by placing David in the same category as "the great dog," not only threatens him with the loss of his basic human identity, it also forges an unconscious identification within his mind between himself and the person he most hates and fears, Mr. Murdstone. Earlier, one will recall, a symbolic indicator of the quality of Murdstone's relationship with David was "a great dog--deep-mouthed and black-haired like Him--and he was very angry at the sight of me, and sprang out to get at me" (DC, p. 43). I do not think I am being fanciful in suggesting that some of David's guilt comes from a sense that he shares something more than his mother with the man he hates; during his marriage to Dora, one will recall, David himself makes the connection when he fears that he has begun to play Mr. Murdstone to Dora's Clara Copperfield. In any event, it is clear that the whole complex of experiences which the young David endures from the time of his mother's marriage instills within him a profound sense of shame and guilt. According to Erikson, shame tends to manifest itself in dreams of nakedness or partial undress:

> Shame supposes that one is completely exposed and conscious of being looked at; in one word, self-conscious. One is visible and not ready to be visible; which is why we dream of shame as a situation in which we are stared at in a condition of incomplete dress, in night attire, "with one's pants down."[70]

David's recurring dreams have an obvious significance:

> I remember dreaming night after night, of being with my mother as she used to be, or of going to a party at Mr. Peggotty's, or of travelling outside the stagecoach, or of dining again with my unfortunate friend the waiter, and in all these circumstances making people scream and stare, by the unhappy disclosure that I had nothing on but my little night-shirt, and that placard. (DC, p. 79)

David's essential sense of himself is shattered by the impact of shame and guilt. Still longing to be the innocent little boy deserving of his mother's love, he nevertheless perceived himself as wicked and unloveable, and the rest of the novel records his struggle to reconcile the apparent contradiction.

Who, or what, he is, is still in doubt even as the adult Copperfield pens the first sentences of the work which he calls "my written memory" (DC, p. 817):

> Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. (DC, p. 1)

To become the hero of his own life, he must become the kind of man his Aunt Betsey holds up to him as an ideal:

> "A fine firm fellow, with a will of your own. With resolution," said my aunt, shaking her cap at me, and clenching her hand. "With determination. With character, Trot. With strength of character that is not to be influenced, except on good reason, by anybody, or by anything. That's what I want you to be." (DC, p. 275)

David must choose between trying to become a person who is secure in his own selfhood, one who can "meet reverses boldly, and not suffer them to frighten us" (DC, p. 499), or content himself with remaining one who is capable only of suffering, not action: in Mr. Micawber's inflated phraseology, "the sport and toy of debasing circumstances" (DC, p. 750). He must learn, in Erikson's terms, to experience himself as "something that has continuity and sameness." For the greater part of his career, however, he clearly tends to perceive himself as a series of different, disconnected personalities, all of whom bear different names.[71]

By the end of the novel, David is securely established as "David Copperfield, Esquire, The Eminent Author" (DC, p. 872), but between birth and maturity he goes by at least half a dozen different names expressive of his separate and conflicting identities. According to his aunt, he ought to have been a girl named Betsey Trotwood Copperfield. He is "Davy" to his mother and Peggotty, and "David" to Mr. Murdstone, who also briefly alters his surname. His aunt rechristens him "Trotwood," while Steerforth knows him as "Daisy." To Dora, he is "Doady," to Agnes, "Trot." His landlady calls him "Mr. Copperfull," and Miss Mowcher nicknames him "Young Innocence." The renaming of David generally serves to separate one portion of David's history from another. This is most obvious when Miss Trotwood renames him in Dover:

> Thus I began my new life, in a new name, and with everything new about me. (DC, p. 215)

David thinks this event obliterates his unhappy past:

> The two things clearest in my mind were, that a remoteness had come upon the old Blunderstone life--which seemed to lie in the haze of an immeasurable distance; and that a curtain had forever fallen on my life at Murdstone and Grinby. (DC, p. 215)

The denial of the past is characteristic of David throughout most of his life. After his mother dies, he erases from his memory the whole period of her marriage to his step-father:

> I remembered her, from that instant, only as the young mother of my earliest impressions . . . In her death she winged her way back to her calm untroubled youth, and cancelled all the rest. (DC, p. 133)

The urge to deny the unhappy past is understandable, but David apparently has trouble connecting his present self with relatively serene passages in his past history. Glorying in his status as head-boy at Strong's Academy, he thinks of his earlier days at the Academy as having been lived by a "little fellow [who] seems to be no part of me: I remember him as something left behind upon the road of life--as something I have passed, rather than have actually been--and almost think of him as someone else" (DC, p. 268).

Although David characteristically strives to dissociate himself from his immediate past, the more remote past of the pre-Murdstone period has a powerful and dangerous attraction for him. In episode after episode, one sees him attempting to repossess his dead mother and the lost garden.[72] His baby-romance with little Em'ly is the first instance of this impulse to retreat; significantly, it takes place immediately after his mother's death, and as David describes it, obviously represents the possibility of a return to the innocent world of early days:

> Ah, how I loved her! What happiness (I thought) if we were married, and were going away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields, never growing older, never growing wiser, children ever, rambling hand in hand through sunshine and among flowery meadows, laying down our heads on moss at night in a sweet sleep of purity and peace, and buried by the birds when we were dead! (DC, p. 147)

The dream, of course, is not realized; David is destined not for the garden but the sordid realities of Murdstone and Grinby, but the attempt to recapture the garden is not relinquished. His flight from the warehouse to Aunt Betsey and Dover represents yet another attempt to return to the paradisal world of infancy:

> . . . panting and crying, but never stopping [I] faced about for Greenwich which I had understood was on the Dover Road: taking very little more out of the world, towards the retreat of my aunt, Miss Betsey, than I had brought into it, on the night when

> my arrival gave her so much umbrage. (DC, p. 179)

This description, with its references to panting and crying, to "taking little more out of the world . . . than I had brought into it," and the specific linking of this episode with David's birth clearly implies that the child is attempting a return to the womb and a second birth which will wipe out all the Murdstone years. His wish appears to be granted as his aunt welcomes him to her immaculate little cottage with its surrounding "garden full of flowers" (DC, p. 190), bathes and feeds him, swaddles him in "two or three great shawls" (DC, p. 195) like a new-born infant,[73] then climaxes the whole process by rechristening him.

David, however, is permitted only a very brief interval in this apparently innocent paradise. His aunt, who has no intention of letting him remain a baby, quickly arranges to send him off to school, and as one traces David's progress in life from this point on, a clear pattern begins to emerge in which the child appears to be permitted to escape into an unfallen world, only to discover a serpent at its heart. From the bosom of his aunt, which, one recalls, conceals both the guilty secret of her marriage and her private misgivings about her rejection of David's mother, the boy goes to board with the Wickfields:

> At length we stopped before a very old house bulging out over the road . . . It was quite spotless in its cleanliness. The old-fashioned brass knocker on the low arched door, ornamented with carved garlands of fruit and flowers, twinkled like a star; the two stone steps descending to the door were as white as if they had been covered with fair linen; and all the angles and corners, and carving and mouldings, and quaint little panes of glass, and quainter little windows, though as old as the hills, were as pure as any snow that ever fell upon the hills. (DC, p. 218)

This house, which combines an air of antiquity with an atmosphere of purity, is presided over by a saintly child, Agnes (her name is no doubt significant) who, with her girlish beauty and practical housekeeping ability, combines the chief attributes of David's mother, Clara, and his old nurse, Peggotty. But the same first glimpse of the house which reveals its star-like knocker, pristine white steps and snow-pure window-glass also discloses "a cadaverous face" which appears "at a small window on the ground floor . . . and quickly disappears" (DC, p. 218). It belongs, we learn, to the snake-like Uriah Heep whose plans include the destruction of Mr. Wickfield and the seduction of Agnes. A similar pattern can be observed in David's experiences at Dr. Strong's Academy. The Doctor, whose smile is "full of amiability, sweetness and simplicity" (DC, p. 228), introduces David to "an old secluded garden . . . where the peaches were ripening on the sunny south wall" (DC, p. 228), but this seeming refuge of peace and innocence is also flawed, this time by the presence of Jack Maldon, would-be seducer of the Doctor's young wife.

The pattern emerges yet again in David's relationship with Dora Spenlow. Her appeal for David is instantaneous and overwhelming:

> All was over in a moment. I had fulfilled my destiny. I was a captive and a slave. I loved Dora Spenlow to distraction.
>
> She was more than human to me. She was a Fairy, a Sylph, I don't know what she was--anything that no one ever saw, and everything that everybody ever wanted. (DC, p. 390)

David says he does not "know what she was," but the reader does. The "captivating, girlish, bright-eyed lovely Dora" (DC, p. 391), with her enchanting air of child-like helplessness, is a reincarnation of Clara Copperfield.[74] Lest anyone miss the point, Dickens gives Dora a speech ("'I am sure I am very affectionate,' said Dora, 'you oughtn't to be cruel to me, Doady!'" [DC, p. 604]) closely paralleling one made by Clara on an earlier occasion:[75]

> "Don't, my love, say that!" implored my mother very piteously. "Oh, don't, Edward! I can't bear to hear it. Whatever I am, I am affectionate. I know I am affectionate. I wouldn't say it, if I wasn't sure that I am. Ask Peggotty. I'm sure she'll tell you I'm affectionate." (DC, p. 51)

David tries to use Dora as a refuge against the troubles of this world, to make her into the "comforter and friend" his mother had once been:

> The more I pitied myself, or pitied others, the more I sought for consolation in the image of Dora. The greater the accumulation of deceit and trouble in the world, the brighter and purer shone the star of Dora high above the world. (DC, p 474)

In the first early flush of love it seems to David that as in the earlier experience with little Em'ly, he is "wandering in a garden of Eden all the while with Dora" (DC, p. 392), and that his love for her is like the pure love of childhood:

> I believe that I was almost as innocently undesigning then, as when I loved little Em'ly. To be allowed to call her "Dora," to write to her, to dote upon and worship her, to have reason to think that when she was with other people she was yet mindful of me. seemed to me the summit of human ambition. (DC, p. 394)

David's attempt to recapture the lost garden of innocence with Dora is as unsuccessful as all his earlier efforts had been, not so much in this case because of the presence of some "serpent," but because David himself finds it increasingly difficult to live with his "child-wife" (DC, p. 643), as she insists upon calling herself, as though they were two little children leading a "party-supper-table kind of life" (DC, p. 504). Part of David wants to stay a child, while another part gropes toward adulthood, and the conflict fills him with frustration and despair:

> "The first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart." These words of Mrs. Strong's were constantly recurring to me, at this time . . . For I knew, now, that my own heart was undisciplined when it first loved Dora; and that if it had been disciplined, it

> never could have felt, when we were married, what it felt in its secret experience. (DC, p. 698)

David tries, in response, "to form Dora's mind," to make her grow up, but his efforts have "no other effect upon Dora than to depress her spirits" (DC, p. 695). Little by little, to his own dismay, he finds himself playing a kind of Murdstone-role[76] to Dora's Clara Copperfield:

> I found myself always in the condition of a school-master, a trap, a pitfall; of always playing spider to Dora's fly; and always pouncing out of my hole to her infinite disturbance. (DC, p. 695)

Dickens eventually rescues David from the consequences of having submitted to "the first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart" by having Dora die, but not before David has had to acknowledge to himself the failure of his youthful dream:

> The old unhappy feeling pervaded my life. It was deepened, if it were changed at all; but it was as undefined as ever, and addressed me like a strain of sorrowful music faintly heard in the night. I loved my wife dearly, and I was happy; but the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting. (DC, p. 697)

The "happiness I had vaguely anticipated once" when he told himself that Dora was "everything that everybody ever wanted" (DC, p. 390) is blissful reunion with mother in the garden, an unattainable ambition that David, for all his frustration, cannot bring himself to relinquish.

Dickens, anticipating Erikson's observations on child development, depicts David as one who, stripped of his sense of inner goodness at an early age, compulsively struggles to win his way back to the innocent world he knew prior to that event, in an effort to escape from a too-painful present and his deep conviction of inner badness. Dickens, however, provides his hero with yet another method for dealing with unresolved guilt, and the figure of Steerforth is of primary importance in this regard. Significantly, one notes that it is the death of Steerforth, not Dora, which precipitates David's great spiritual crisis:

> From the accumulated sadness into which I fell, I had at length no hope of ever issuing again. I roamed from place to place, carrying my burden with me everywhere. . . . I said in my heart that it could never be lightened.
>
> When this despondency was at its worst, I believed that I should die. . . . I passed on farther away, from city to city, seeking I know not what, and trying to leave I know not what behind. (DC, p. 814)

What David is trying to find is innocence; what he is trying to leave behind is guilt, and both of them are intimately associated for him with the figure of Steerforth.

David first meets Steerforth, one will recall, after Mr. Murdstone has packed him off to Creakle's school as a punishment for having resisted his step-father. His "crime" is publicly proclaimed by the infamous placard, and the child is brought before Steerforth, the school's head-boy, "as before a magistrate" (DC, p. 84). The older boy, however, offers the judgement that the punishment inflicted upon David is "a jolly shame" (DC, p. 84), in other words, unjust and undeserved. For this symbolic sentence of exoneration, David "became bound to him [Steerforth] for ever afterwards" (DC, p. 84).

One of Steerforth's functions in the novel is to reassure David that he is still, in spite of his consciousness of guilt, really the good little boy Clara Copperfield once loved.[77] Steerforth wins David's unswerving love by seeming to see the boy as a helpless innocent, in need of care and protection:

> "Good-night, young Copperfield," said Steerforth. "I'll take care of you."
>
> "You're very kind," I gratefully returned. "I'm very much obliged to you."
>
> "You haven't got a sister, have you?" said Steerforth, yawning.
>
> "No," I answered.

> "That's a pity," said Steerforth. "If you had one, I should think she would have been a pretty, timid, little bright-eyed sort of girl. I should have liked to know her." (DC, p. 87)

David and Steerforth, however, are separated when Clara's death results in David's leaving school, and in the long interval before they meet again, a number of factors exacerbate the already heavy burden of guilt David carries. There is "the shame I felt in my position" (DC, p. 155) when he is thrust out into the working class world of the warehouse. Even more distressing to the boy is the way in which those whom he encounters appear to recognize him as potentially or actually criminal. His nightmarish flight to Dover is marked by mysterious accusations and charges. "'Come to the pollis!'" (DC, p. 178) cries the carter who steals his box. A lunatic pawn-broker not only cheats him out of his jacket, but appears to be under the impression that David is one of the boys who perpetually taunt him and repeatedly flies at the child "as if he were going to tear me in pieces" (DC, p. 185). A tinker pretends David has stolen "'my brother's silk handkercher'" (DC, p. 187) and threatens to "'rip [his] young body open'" (DC, p. 185) in retaliation. Even his aunt's first words to him are "'Go away! . . . Go along! No boys here!'" (DC, p. 191). Later, she tells Mr. Dick, in David's presence, that her nephew is "'as like Cain before he was grown up, as can be'" (DC, p. 197). All of these judgements serve to confirm the child's own worst fears about his inner being, and tend to increase his dependence on anyone who appears to refute them. This is precisely the role that Steerforth plays when, years later, he once again encounters David:

> "You're a devilsh amiable-looking fellow, Copperfield. Just what you used to be, now I look at you! Not altered in the least!" (DC, p. 287)

He makes it quite clear that the quality he still finds in David is innocence:

> "My dear young Davy," he said, clapping me on the shoulder again, "you are a very Daisy. The daisy of the field, at sunrise, is not fresher than you." (DC, p. 288)

Steerforth is really the only person in David's whole life since the pre-Murdstone years who seems to see in David the child David wants to be, yet fears he is not. It is no wonder that Copperfield's response to a renewed acquaintance with his old schoolmate is so emotionally highly-charged:

> . . . his former protection of me appeared so deserving of my gratitude, and my old love for him overflowed my breast so freshly and spontaneously, that I went up to him at once with a fast-beating heart . . . .
>
> I grasped him by both hands, and could not let them go. But for very shame, and the fear that it might displease him, I could have held him round the neck and cried.
>
> "I never, never, never was so glad! My dear Steerforth, I am so overjoyed to see you." (DC, p. 287)

Steerforth, in effect, can help David to believe that he still properly belongs to the garden.

Steerforth, however, not only serves to shore up David's longed-for but shaky identification with the old Davy, "the dearest little fellow that ever was" (DC, p. 20), he also functions as a convenient figure upon whom David can project aspects of himself that he does not dare or wish to acknowledge, and this is a factor of their relationship from the very beginning. At school, for instance, David, at Steerforth's urging, spends his whole term's pocket-money on a magnificent feast for the boys. He tells us that he has "a secret misgiving" that what he is doing is "nearly all wrong" (DC, p. 85), but the whole episode is presented in such a way that David appears to be the innocent victim of the more experienced older boy. A clearer instance, which also takes place during David's school days, has to do with the unjust dismissal of Mr. Mell. It is Steerforth, of course, who baits the teacher, but it is with information provided by David:

> "If he is not a beggar himself, his near relation's one," said Steerforth, "It's all the same."
>
> He glanced at me, and Mr. Mell's hand gently patted me on the shoulder. I looked up with a flush upon my face and remorse in my heart, but Mr. Mell's eyes were fixed on Steerforth. He continued to pat me kindly on the shoulder, but he looked at him.
>
> "Since you expect me, Mr. Creakle, to justify myself," said Steerforth, "and to say what I mean,--what I have to say is, that his mother lives on charity in an alms-house."
>
> Mr. Mell still looked at him, and still patted me kindly on the shoulder, and said to himself in a whisper, if I heard him right: "Yes, I thought so." (DC, p. 99)

Mr. Mell's response, as he looks accusingly at Steerforth while gently patting the guilt-stricken David, suggests the way in which the attention drawn by the older boy's more blatant wrong-doing seems to protect David from public acknowledgement of his own guilty part in events. Steerforth destroys Mr. Mell with information given him by David, as both David and the teacher know, but it is Steerforth who is perceived as the villain, David who is gently comforted for his "unwitting" participation.

Mr. Mell is not the only one to encourage David in a dangerous habit of moral evasion. Agnes Wickfield does the same thing, when, having encountered a very inebriated David enjoying a night on the town with Steerforth, she cautions the boy against his "Bad Angel." David heatedly rejects the label:

> "He my bad Angel, or any one's! He, anything but a guide, a support, and a friend to me. My dear Agnes! Now, is it not unjust, and unlike you, to judge him from what you saw of me the other night?" (DC, p. 367)

David is very warm on Steerforth's behalf, but the warmth I would suggest is itself suspicious. David unconsciously wants others to see him as an innocent and impressionable boy whose follies are not really his fault because he has been led astray by his bad Angel. He cannot, however, permit himself to acknowledge that this is Steerforth's role; if he once did, he would have to accept responsibility for himself: hence the violent rejection of the bad Angel label. I am aware that this may sound dangerously like the kind of vulgarized Freudianism in which all denials are presumed to be proof to the contrary, but there is, as I shall shortly argue, further evidence within the novel to suggest that Steerforth is psychologically important to David in a mechanism of denial.

We have already noted how the youthful Dickens in novels like Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop tends to concentrate innocence and wickedness in separate characters. David Copperfield, it seems to me, in his attempts to interpret his life through the medium of autobiography, appears to emulate his creator by striving to view the events of his life in similar terms. He tries to see himself as David the innocent, more sinned against than sinning, ultimately guilty of little more than weakness, while presenting others, but particularly Steerforth, as demonic figures who are really responsible for all the evil that takes place. In that sense, Steerforth is best interpreted as a psychological projection of David.

The notion that David and Steerforth are in some way one and the same character is not, of course, new,[78] nor is the device of splitting a character in two particularly innovative. Novelists have employed the device since at least the time of Fielding without meaning to suggest anything like psychological projection. Dickens's fondness for the device, which he uses in a fairly conventional manner in A Tale of Two Cities, with its twin figures of Evrémond and Darnay, has sometimes been attributed to an inability to present the good and the bad in one character.[79] The relationship between David and Steerforth, however, is much more complex. There are strong undercurrents of feeling in David's attitude towards Steerforth which suggest to me that David, the ostensible author of the work, and not simply Dickens as the actual author, is attempting to use Steerforth to symbolize hidden aspects of himself.

Some clue to the role that Steerforth plays in relation to David is suggested by the latter's account of events surrounding the seduction of little Em'ly. After the catastrophe has taken place, David reproaches himself for having played "an unconscious part in [Steerforth's] pollution of an honest home" (DC, p. 455), implying that his sole guilt lies in having been the means of introducing Steerforth to the Peggottys. A speech by Miss Mowcher, however, suggests that his "unconscious part" may have been much greater than he dare admit to himself:

> "May the Father of all Evil confound him!" said the little woman . . . "but I believed it was you who had a boyish passion for her! . . . why did you praise her so, and blush, and look disturbed?"
>
> I could not conceal from myself that I had done this, though for a reason very different from her supposition.
>
> "What did I know?" said Miss Mowcher . . . "I saw Steerforth soothe and please you by his praise of her! You were the first to mention her name. You owned to an old admiration of her. You were hot and cold, and red and white, all at once when I spoke of her. What could I think--what did I think--but that you were a young libertine in everything but experience, and had fallen into hands that had experience enough, and could manage you (having the fancy) for your own good?" (DC, p. 463)

Although David is careful to insist upon the pure asexuality of his attachment to Em'ly, Miss Mowcher's description of his reactions ("hot and cold, red and white") suggest thoughts less coolly chaste than those of perfect innocence. I do not think it too far-fetched to suggest that part of David's exaggerated affection for Steerforth arises from admiration of Steerforth's courage to act where David dares only dream. One notes that David confesses that he had never loved Steerforth more than in the aftermath of this event:

> . . . I had never loved Steerforth better than when the ties that bound me to him were broken. . . . Deeply as I felt my unconscious part in his pollution of an honest home, I believed that if I had been brought face to face with him, I could not have uttered one reproach. (DC, p. 455)

Steerforth is clearly an idealized version of a self that David would like to be. Where David is timid and fearful, passive and easily led, Steerforth is full of self-confidence and assurance. Everyone, from schoolmasters to waiters (in whose presence David is noticeably cowed) quails in Steerforth's commanding presence. More important still, as the only child of a widowed mother who describes him as "my son . . . the object of my life, to whom its every thought has been devoted, whom I have gratified from a child in every wish, from whom I have had no separate existence since his birth" (DC, p. 469), he enjoys the single-minded maternal devotion for which David still pines. Adored by his mother, undeterred by timid moral scruples, Steerforth is everything that David both wishes and fears to be.

L. A. G. Strong, in a study of Steerforth, calls attention to a curious sentimentality or weakness in the presentation. He calls him "a light-weight villain" and adds that Steerforth "cannot even deputize for the real evil Dickens always needed."[80] The strangely muted depiction of whatever evil Steerforth is supposed to embody arises, I would submit, not from any failure in Dickens's craft, but from the ambivalence of David's attitude. Steerforth's glamorous sophistication is the antithesis of the childish innocence which David struggles to maintain, but it is also immensely attractive to the younger boy, and this leads David to depict him in terms which suggest both the traditional demonic villain and the romantic, Byronic hero. The latter very much softens and undercuts the impact of the former.

The demonic is suggested, as is frequently the case with Dickens, by images of fire and smoke. One of David's earliest memories of Steerforth has him, when asked how he would deal with Mr. Creakle, pausing "to dip a match into his phosphorous box, on purpose to shed a glare over his reply" (DC, p. 86). On another occasion, moodily contemplating his designs on little Em'ly, he is described as "idly beating a lump of coal on top of the fire with a poker" (DC, p. 424). In addition, the presence of his cat-like manservant, Littimer, suggests something like the demonic familiar.

David mostly, however, presents Steerforth as a kind of Byronic hero. This too, of course, is a type with demonic connotations, but designed to elicit admiration and sympathy, especially sympathy. David manages to intimate that Steerforth pursues little Em'ly less out of a wicked desire to corrupt her than in response to the same need that makes him seek out the rough company of the fishermen:

> I knew that his restless nature and bold spirits delighted to find a vent in rough toil and hard weather, as in any other means of excitement that presented itself freshly to him. (DC, p. 319)

Em'ly, one assumes, is simply another "means of excitement" in an otherwise meaningless existence, an anodyne for existential anguish.

Steerforth has a conventionally Byronic awareness of impending doom which makes him hear the sea roar "'as if it were hungry for us'"

(DC, p. 311), and is also prone to fits of remorse in which he sees himself fated for damnation and powerless to avert it:

> "David, I wish to God I had had a judicious father these last twenty years.
>
> . . . .
>
> I wish with all my soul I had been better guided! . . . I wish with all my soul I could guide myself better!
>
> . . . .
>
> It would be better to be this poor Peggotty, or his lout of a nephew," he said, getting up and leaning moodily against the chimney piece with his face towards the fire, "than to be myself . . . and be the torment to myself, in this Devil's bark of a boat, within the last half hour!" (DC, p. 322)

Even his death is made suitably romantic. No ugly demise on the gallows, like Fagin's, or sordid death in the mudflats, like Quilp's, but a heroic, even Shelleyan ending in a storm at sea:

> The wreck . . . was breaking up. . . . the life of the solitary man upon the mast [Steerforth] hung by a thread. Still, he clung to it. He had a singular red cap on,--not like a sailor's cap, but of finer colour; and as the few yielding planks between him and destruction rolled and bulged, and his anticipative death-knell rung, he was seen by all of us to wave it. (DC, pp. 793-94)

What could be more stereotypically romantic than the solitary figure, gallantly waving his red cap (of course "of a finer colour" than the ordinary sailor's) while the ship founders beneath him in full sight of awe-struck beholders?

Steerforth, then, (to conclude this portion of the discussion) is an interesting variation of the traditional Dickens devil in that his demonic qualities are as much a projection of aspects of the supposedly "innocent" hero as the expression of anything objectively inherent in his nature. His primary significance is not moral but psychological. He is, in effect, a figure created as much by David as by Dickens in order to fulfill specific psychological needs. On the one hand, with his insistence on the younger boy's "Daisy"-like qualities, he provides David with reassurance that he is still, in spite of everything, the harmless innocent Clara loved. At the same time, he enables David to achieve a temporary resolution of the conflict between his longing for the innocent passivity of childhood and his admiration for the glamorous sophistication of experience by serving as a figure through whom David can experience both the vicarious satisfaction of his "wicked" desires and the preservation of his illusion of innocence. With Steerforth's death, however, the whole precarious structure collapses. Forced to confront himself at long last, David perceives only darkness and emptiness: "and all the world seemed death and silence" (DC, p. 801).

Steerforth, however, is not the only character upon whom David projects aspects of his fragmented self. Uriah Heep is another. He and David are obviously linked by the Biblical associations of their respective Christian names, but one notes that a significant reversal has taken place. In Dickens's novel, Uriah is the sexual aggressor while David acts as the horrified innocent bystander. In attempting to cling to a concept of himself as the perpetual innocent, David Copperfield tends to deny all those aspects of his nature which are inimical to that desired identity. Steerforth, as we have seen, embodies the worldliness to which David is attracted, but which he also fears because it is incongruous with innocence. Uriah, I would suggest, represents David's fear of male sexuality, and functions as a projection of drives David cannot acknowledge, again because they are inconsistent with his need to perceive himself as a child. Like Steerforth, Uriah exhibits certain aspects of the demonic, but where Steerforth's portrait obviously owes a good deal to the dashing, romantic villains of gothic romance, Heep's description owes more to the older folk tradition of the devil as a physically repulsive, sinister buffoon.[81] Great stress is placed on his "snaky undulation[s]" (DC, p. 378), and reptilian "unsheltered, unshaded" eyes (DC, p. 219). He has the traditional devil's red hair (DC, p. 219), skull-like face and "long, lank, skeleton hand" (DC, p. 219). As he sits by the fire, the flames cast an "appropriately red light" (DC, p. 380) upon his face. He is also specifically described by others as an incubus (DC, p. 775), "the detestable serpent . . . the transcendent and immortal hypocrite and perjurer" (DC, p. 711); "one whom it were superfluous to call Demon" (DC, p. 757). These images are coupled with others which strongly suggest a revolting animal sexuality as one of Heep's chief characteristics. Beast images, of course, in the form of Murdstone's "great dog," have already been employed to suggest sexual agression. Their use is even more specific in Uriah's case. References to him as "the red-headed animal" (DC, p. 381) and "the red fox" (DC, p. 518) link him with the traditional emblem of lust.

David's intense physical aversion to all that Heep represents is indicated by his frequent association of Uriah's hand with cold-blooded slimy creatures. His very touch makes David's skin creep:

> . . . his [Heep's] damp cold hand felt so much like a frog in mine, that I was tempted to drop it and run away. (DC, p. 377)

The hand is a veiled metaphor for sexuality which becomes explicitly phallic when Heep, as happens frequently, is likened to a snake or an eel:

> He had a way of writhing when he wanted to express enthusiasm, which was very ugly: and which diverted my attention from the compliment he had paid my relation, to the snaky twistings of his throat and body. (DC, p. 235)

> "Years don't tell much in our firm, Master Copperfield, except in raising up the 'umble, namely mother and self--and in developing," he added as an afterthought, "the beautiful, namely Miss Agnes."
>
> He jerked himself about after this compliment, in such an intolerable manner, that my aunt . . . lost all patience.
>
> "Deuce take the man!" said my aunt sternly, "what's he about? Don't be galvanic, sir! . . . If you're an eel, sir, conduct yourself like one. If you're a man, control your limbs, sir. Good God!" said my aunt, with great indignation, "I am not going to be serpentined and cork-screwed out of my senses!" (DC, p. 517)

Uriah's attitude towards Agnes, in spite of the obsequious humility with which he masks his fierce agression, is blatantly sexual. At one point, in a grossly sensual image, he likens her to a pear which he intends to devour, and then, to David's horror, seems to make "motions with his mouth as if the pear were ripe already, and he were smacking his lips over it" (DC, p. 580). David's own love affairs, by contrast, are curiously asexual. In his relationships with little Em'ly and Dora, his chief objective, as we have already noted, is the restoration of his lost childhood. He and Dora, as man and wife, are like two children playing house. Near the end of the novel, he finally admits to himself that he loves Agnes as a woman, but throughout most of their mutual history, he insists that he feels for her only the pure affection of a brother. He associates her with stained glass, calls her his better angel, and to Agnes's patent distress, scarcely seems to see her as flesh and blood at all. So long as David's sense of identity remains fragmented, he cannot acknowledge adult love for an adult woman. This is why he cannot, until the very end of the autobiography which is supposed to represent his quest for self-integration, be joined with Agnes in what is meant to be perceived as an adult union.

The opening of the final number of David Copperfield depicts a shattered David. All his attempts to retreat into childhood and to deny those aspects of himself which he cannot acknowledge have failed. Uriah has been denounced and imprisoned; Dora and Steerforth are both dead; little Em'ly, her innocence forever destroyed by her illicit liaison, has gone to Australia. With all his props and anchors gone, David can only wander aimlessly around Europe under "an ever-darkening cloud" (*DC*, p. 814): "I had had no purpose, no sustaining soul within me, anywhere" (*DC*, p. 814). "No sustaining soul," no coherent sense of selfhood or identity. The form of the verb, "I *had* had," suggests that now, at the time of writing, he has. The final pages of the work are clearly intended to convey an impression of David's discovery of himself, which culminates in his marriage with Agnes. He tells us how Nature soothed and calmed him, how he was gradually able to return to the England he had fled, and how, to his delight, he finally realized that Agnes had loved him all along. I find these pages among the weakest and most unconvincing in the whole novel. Dickens, I think, would have us believe that David has finally learned who he is, and would have us see him as one who has grown up at last and entered upon the life of a responsible adult. David tells us he has "worked out his own destiny" (*DC*, p. 857), and when he thinks that Agnes will never be his, claims that he can bear that with cheerful fortitude, implying that he recognizes and acknowledges responsibility for what has happened to him, and can accept the consequences.

I think this is only partially true. The writing of his autobiography helps him to connect "the persons he has been with the person he is now." Nor is this achieved without considerable pain as he forces himself to examine events he would rather forget, like the

Murdstone-Grinby episode:

> . . . a curtain has for ever fallen on my life at Murdstone and Grinby's. No one has ever raised that curtain since. I have lifted it for a moment, even in this narrative, with a reluctant hand, and dropped it gladly. . . . I only know that it was, and ceased to be; and that I have written, and there leave it. (DC, p. 215)

The hand may be reluctant, but the curtain is lifted, and the event examined and assimilated. Similarly, he forces himself to recall in detail the deaths of Dora and Steerforth, in spite of the pain those memories evoke. Ultimately, however, I think that Dickens lets David slip back into something like the state of childhood bliss which the rest of the novel has rejected as both unattainable and undesireable.[82]

One notes that as David nears the end of his European exile, his state of depression and hopelessness is lifted by a combination of two events. The first is a sort of Wordsworthian[83] (or perhaps one might say Carlylean, recalling the appropriate passage from Sartor) experience of Nature:

> I came into the valley, as the evening sun was shining on the remote heights of snow, that closed it in like eternal clouds. The bases of the mountains forming the gorge within which the little village lay, were richly green; and high above this gentler vegetation grew forests of dark fir, cleaving the wintry snow-drift . . . Dotted here and there on the mountain's side, each tiny dot a home, were lonely wooden cottages, so dwarfed by the towering heights that they appeared too small for toys. So did even the clustered village in the valley, with its wooden bridge across the stream . . . In the quiet air there was a sound of distant singing--shepherd voices; but as the bright evening cloud floated midway along the mountain's side, I could almost believe it came from there, and was not earthly music. All at once, in this serenity, great Nature spoke to me; and soothed me to lay down my weary head upon the grass, and weep as I had not wept yet, since Dora died! (DC, p. 815)

The second is a letter from Agnes, full of maternal-sounding encouragement and support:

> She gave me no advice; she urged no duty upon me; she only told me,

> in her own fervent manner, what her trust in me was. She knew (she said) how such a nature as mine would turn affliction to good. . . . She was sure that in my every purpose I should gain a firmer and a higher tendency, through the grief I had undergone. She, who so gloried in my fame, and so looked forward to its augmentation, well knew that I would labour on. She knew that in me, sorrow could not be weakness, but must be strength. As the endurance of my childish days had done its part to make me what I was, so greater calamities would nerve me on, to be yet better than I was; and so, as they had taught me, would I teach others. (DC, p. 815)

The quiet air, the tiny homes and shepherd voices suggest the pastoral tranquillity of David's earliest recollections of his home, while in Agnes's letter, the tone is that of the loving and all-accepting mother. The juxtaposition of these two passages sounds to me suspiciously like mother and the garden all over again, a suspicion confirmed by David's description of his feelings when Agnes agrees to marry him:

> We stood together in the same old-fashioned window at night, when the moon was shining; Agnes with her quiet eyes raised up to it; I following her glance. Long miles of road then opened out before my mind; and toiling on, I saw a ragged way-worn boy forsaken and neglected, who should come to call even the heart now beating against mine, his own. (DC, p. 863)

Dickens has attempted in this novel to carry the hero from childhood to full maturity, but on the threshold of success, he halts, and allows David to find in Agnes the kind of paradisal security with an idealized mother-figure which David has wanted all along.

In the ending of David Copperfield, one cannot escape the implication that David, in spite of all the stress laid upon his adult status as an eminent author and father of a family, is, behind his grown-up facade, still the "way-worn boy" come home to mother[84] and the garden at last. But the fact that the ending apparently repudiates the general movement of the novel as a whole, which has led us to expect some clearer rejection of childish bliss as the ultimate goal for an adult hero, does not alter the fact that the work in general, apart from its conclusion, does continue the trend towards the depiction of childhood innocence as something more complex than the earlier novels had suggested. The view that the innocence of the child, viewed realistically, is a morally ambiguous quality is present in Dickens's works at least as early as Barnaby Rudge, and is further explored in Dombey and Son with its hint of potential corruption in Paul. Perhaps one of the most striking things about Copperfield's depiction of David's childhood is the way in which Dickens can clearly suggest the self-centredness of childhood without diminishing its appeal. David's infant fears, for instance, that his dead father might return to supplant him in his mother's affections (DC, p. 14), and his sense of self-importance in the midst of his grief over his mother's death (DC, p. 124) make him, in his naivete, an even more touching figure than Oliver or Nell, because his portrait has a realistic dimension which theirs lacks.

Most important of all is David Copperfield's emphasis on the essential internality of evil. Again, this notion can be traced at least as far back as Barnaby Rudge with its suggestion that Gashford's role involves, not the corruption of an innocent populace, but the unleashing of already existing destructive impulses. It is also, of course, a theme of considerable importance in both Martin Chuzzlewit and Dombey and Son, but in David Copperfield Dickens not only deals with the consequences of human selfishness and blindness, he also explores in compelling detail the processes by which an "innocent" child becomes a fallen adult.

In the novels of the later period, which we shall be examining in the next two chapters, we shall see first of all how Dickens in Bleak House turns his attention away from the depiction of innocence to concentrate on the plight of a fallen heroine who must struggle to assimilate the fact of her own human imperfection, and who, still with some ambiguity, but nevertheless with much greater success than David, ultimately learns that redemption lies, not in some innocent paradise safely remote from the fallen world, but within that world itself. In Little Dorrit, a novel which I regard as a decisive turning point in Dickens's career, we shall see him arrive at a total redefinition of innocence which raises it far above the status of a merely childish attribute to the level of something much more profound.

CHAPTER III

BLEAK HOUSE: THE END OF INNOCENCE

Introduction

The young Charles Dickens, beginning his career in the first flush of optimism and the heady atmosphere of success, had little difficulty in identifying evil and distinguishing it from the good. The early novels set clearly defined devil figures like Fagin, Quilp, and Sir John Chester against saintly exemplars of unsullied innocence like Pickwick, Oliver, Nell, and to some extent, Barnaby Rudge. As Dickens matures, however, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to make such simple and sweeping judgements. He continues to portray characters who exhibit certain demonic characteristics, but the motives of a Jonas Chuzzlewit, a Mr. Carker, a James Steerforth or a Uriah Heep are psychologically explicable in a way that the actions of the earlier villains are not. In addition, the victims of this second set of "demonic" villains tend to display a certain moral ambiguity. Martin Chuzzlewit is from the outset a seriously flawed young man; Mr. Dombey is the prisoner of his own cold arrogance; even the apparent innocence of David Copperfield is little more than infantile egocentricity.

Bleak House is the first of the richly symbolic novels of Dickens's later period, and in it he presents us with a world more clearly evil than anything he had depicted previously. The evil is embodied not just by one, or even two[1] devil-like characters, but by a multitude of demonic figures (Krook, Vholes, Tulkinghorn and the whole Smallweed family). The evil which permeates the world of Bleak House is, however, too vast to be contained by even all of these, and as has been long recognized, finds its most powerful expression in the mists and fogs emanating from Chancery.

The fog, in one form or another, penetrates every corner of the world of Bleak House. In Dickens's earlier works, although evil was depicted as something very powerful, and the chief devil of the novel frequently assisted by minions like the Brasses, Monks or Bill Sikes, the ultimate "triumph of Good" was assured by the presence of both people (pure children) and places (pastoral retreats) who remained morally uncontaminated. Children in Bleak House, however, figure primarily as victims: the Necketts, the little Jellybys, and the child Esther. While there are a great many examples of the child as victim, the child as innocent appears only in parody: Harold Skimpole, the "damaged young man" (BH, p. 69) whose child-like spontaneity conceals a cold-blooded opportunism. The chief burden of opposition to the forces of corruption and decay falls to Esther Summerson, a weak and fallible human being who bears the stigma of illegitimacy, a metaphor, in Lawrence Frank's phrase, for "the terrible complexities of being human."[2] In addition, one perceives a gradual shrinking of the pastoral retreat, until it almost disappears altogether. Bleak House sees Dickens finally relinquish his cherished illusion of the possibility of innocence: Esther's task throughout the novel requires her both to recognize and to accept her identity as a fallen being in a fallen world. In finally doing so, she succeeds where David Copperfield failed.

Bleak House

In the opinion of some critics, Bleak House contains no devils. According to Robert A. Donovan, "the Court of Chancery, the main focus of evil in the novel and the mundane equivalent of hell, harbours no devil, only a rather mild and benevolent gentleman."[3] Mrs. Leavis, in a note to her essay on Bleak House, is even more emphatic:

> Dickens has dispensed with the diabolical; all evil in Bleak House is in certain human instincts that his form of society sanctions and institutionalizes. The Devil is an unnecessary concept. Krook remarks to Mr. Tulkinghorn of Nemo, "They say he has sold himself to the enemy, but you and I know better--he don't buy."[4]

As an example of a novel in which Dickens, however, has supposedly "dispensed with the diabolical," Bleak House contains a surprisingly large amount of demonic imagery, much of it clustered about the figures of the Smallweeds, Krook, Mr. Tulkinghorn and Vholes. It is true that the work contains no single major devil figure like Quilp or Fagin--Tulkinghorn, the most plausible candidate for the office, is a subordinate figure related to a larger pattern of evil--nevertheless, having granted that much, one must go on to insist that the kind of imagery associated with Dickens's early novels is still present in this, his ninth novel, and that its presence points to the operation of a demonic principle within the world of Bleak House. These devils, whose demonic identities I shall demonstrate, are all agents of a larger demonic principle with which they are connected--the Court of Chancery and the Lord Chancellor. They embody evil as a principle of negation, and epitomize, like the prison in Little Dorrit and the river in Our Mutual Friend, in Bert Hornback's phrase "an insistently post-lapsarian world."[5]

The Smallweed family, a grotesque quartet of petrified gnomes, are the most obvious examples of devil figures in the novel:

> The shutters are more or less closed all over the house, and the ground floor is sufficiently dark to require candles. Introduced into the back shop by Mr. Smallweed the younger, they [Guppy and Weevle], fresh from the sunlight, can at first see nothing save darkness and shadows; but they gradually discern the elder Mr. Smallweed seated in his chair upon the brink of a well or grave of waste paper; the virtuous Judy groping therein, like a female sexton; and Mrs. Smallweed on the level ground in the vicinity, snowed up in a heap of paper fragments, print and manuscript, which would appear to be the accumulated compliments that have been sent flying at her in the course of the day. The whole party, Small included, are blackened with dust and dirt, and present a fiendish appearance not relieved by the general aspect of the room. (BH, p. 558)

In this passage, Dickens employs a number of images which he has used throughout the course of the novel to characterize and symbolize evil: darkness and shadows, dust and dirt, graves and winter. Although only the "appearance" of the party is explicitly "fiendish," the reader is inundated, both here and elsewhere, by a multiplicity of demonic associations in what the Smallweeds say and do, and by the descriptive details of their surroundings. These details, which include references to goblins, imps, witches, insects, reptiles, animal familiars and fire and smoke, are of no great significance in isolation, but taken together, they have a powerful cumulative effect. Bart Smallweed, we are told, "is a kind of fossil imp . . . precociously possessed of centuries of owlish wisdom" (BH, p. 275), "a weird changeling," who "drinks and smokes in a monkeyish way" (BH, p. 275). His grandfather "a baleful old malignant, who would be very wicked if he could" (BH, p. 292), exhibits "an air of goblin rakishness" (BH, p. 292), and is variously described as "a leech . . . a snake . . . a lobster" (BH, p. 473). When asked how he occupies his time, his reply has sinister overtones: "I watch the fire--and the boiling and the roasting--"

(BH, p. 297). The statement, although innocent enough in context, along with Dickens's descriptions of his claw-like nails and impotent lust to "rend and tear the visage of Mr. George" (BH, p. 371), suggests that Grandfather Smallweed would be right at home with the demons who dismember Dr. Faustus in the last act of Marlowe's play.[6] Grandmother Smallweed is affectionately described by her husband as "a brimstone idiot . . . a scorpion,--a brimstone scorpion . . . a sweltering toad . . . a chattering clattering broomstick witch, that ought to be burnt" (BH, p. 298). Her granddaughter, Judy Smallweed, shares with her brother "the before-mentioned family likeness to the monkey tribe" (BH, p. 290), while the original founder of this charming family group, we are informed, was a certain "horny-skinned, two-legged, money-getting species of spider, who spun webs to catch unwary flies, and retired into holes until they were entrapped" (BH, p. 286). These are devils straight out of the middle ages, unromantic, repulsive agents of age-old evil.

As devils, the Smallweeds exhibit an instinctive hostility towards everything that is associated with light, growth and life, preferring darkness, sterility and death. Their house is located "in a little narrow street, always solitary, shady and sad, closely bricked in on all sides like a tomb" (BH, p. 287), and the parlour, where Grandfather and Grandmother Smallweed sit on either side of the fire looking like "a couple of sentinels long forgotten on their post by the Black Serjeant, Death" (BH, p. 289), is a small, grave-like room "certain feet below the level of the street" (BH, p. 288). Childhood in particular is anathema to them:

> The house of Smallweed . . . has discarded all amusements,

> discountenanced all story books, fairy tales, fictions and fables, and banished all levities whatsoever. Hence, the gratifying fact that it has had no child born to it, and that the complete little men and women whom it has produced have been observed to bear a likeness to old monkeys with something depressing on their minds. (BH, p. 288)

They not only deny childhood through their banishing of all its traditional pastimes and delights and actively persecute its representatives, as Judy Smallweed's harsh treatment of little Charley Neckett reveals, they also manage, in an obscene reversal of the natural pattern of growth, to mock childhood with a senile parody of it:

> There has been only one child in the Smallweed family for several generations. Little old men and women there have been, but no child, until Mr. Smallweed's grandmother now living, became weak in her intellect, and fell (for the first time) into a childish state. With such infantine graces as a total want of observation, memory, understanding and interest, and an eternal disposition to fall asleep over the fire and into it, Mr. Smallweed's grandmother has undoubtedly brightened the family. (BH, p. 287)

Parody, which Frye[7] identifies as characteristic of the demonic, is a significant element in Bleak House, as both Leonard F. Deen[8] and Robert Barnard[9] have noted. The Smallweeds' demonic identity is suggested not only by Grandmother Smallweed's senile imitation of childhood, but even more explicitly in Judy Smallweed's role as a parody of Esther. Esther, as the housekeeper of Bleak House, establishes a true order based on love and consideration. Judy too is a housekeeper, but she superintends the running of the Smallweed establishment with a painful and life-denying parsimoniousness. The ritual of providing and serving food, always an important moral indicator in Dickens's novels,[10] is performed by Esther with grace and generosity. Even an unwelcome visitor like Mr. Guppy is courteously served, while Esther hovers solicitously over him:

> "I have only waited to see that you have everything you want. Is there anything I can order for you?" (BH, p. 123)

Meals in the Smallweed establishment are a frugal affair, unceremoniously served by Judy "with a great clash and clatter" (BH, p. 290), and terminated as rapidly as possible. Charley Neckett is served "a Druidical ruin of bread and butter" (BH, p. 293), and when she is interrupted at her meal by a knock at the door, her mistress immediately "takes that opportunity of jumbling the remainder of the bread-and-butter together, and launching two or three dirty tea-cups into the ebb-tide of a basin of tea; as a hint that she considers the eating and drinking terminated" (BH, p. 294).

Judy is really a kind of demonic mirror-image of Esther. While Esther is characterized by youthful beauty, Judy has an "old face," and looks like an ancient monkey. Esther has a natural sympathy for children. She mothers the young Jellybys and patiently endures the kicks and pinches of the unhappy little Pardiggles. Judy, on the other hand, feels "an instinctive repugnance" towards children, and the contrast between her attitude and Esther's is brought out clearly in the differing responses of the two girls towards Charley Neckett, who is employed first by Judy, then by Esther. Judy, an accomplished practitioner of the"art of girl driving" (BH, p. 294), abuses and half-starves Charley; Esther teaches her to read and write, tenderly nurses her through the small-pox and treats her more like a beloved young friend than a servant. Esther's association throughout the novel with green and growing things is an important indicator of her moral significance. Her surname is Summerson, she is educated at Greenleaf School, and her sitting room at Bleak House overlooks a flower garden which she delights to tend. In an ironic parallel, Judy has "in her time, been apprenticed to the art and mystery of artificial flower-making" (BH, p. 293, my italics).

A similar strand of demonic imagery runs through the portrait of Krook, the surrogate Lord Chancellor. His dimly-lit shop, filled with piles of legal rubbish, its low ceiling made lower still by the odds and ends suspended from it, its windows choked with signs and old bottles, has a cave-like atmosphere suggesting, in Joseph Fradkin's words, "a devil's lair."[11] Fradkin identified Krook with the traditional fairy-tale witch or ogre, but the description of the old man standing in the midst of a litter of rags and bones with "the breath issuing in a visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire inside" (BH, p. 50), suggests an even more ancient image of evil, the fire-breathing dragon in his den, surrounded by the grisly remains of his victims.

The descriptions of the Smallweeds employ the most obvious and traditional kinds of demonic imagery, but Krook's identity as a devil is suggested by more complex and subtle means. Blatant allusions to smoke and fire, demons and imps are replaced by emphasis on evil's life-denying characteristics:

> He was short, cadaverous and withered; with his head sunk sideways between his shoulders . . . His throat, chin, and eyebrows were frosted with white hairs, and so gnarled with veins and puckered skin that he looked from his breast upward, like some old root in a fall of snow. (BH, p. 50)

At the beginning of this passage, Krook, with his drooping head on his shrunken frame, is corpse-like but still recognizably human. In the course of the description, however, he degenerates into something less than human, a gnarled tree-root in a winter world. He is, in a link with the novel's opening description of a world in the process of un-creation, an image of the death of nature, as well as a symbol of the collapse of the human into the sub-human. One notes that it is from the breast upwards, the area of the heart and head, affection and reason, that Krook has become dead and wooden.

Krook is always accompanied by his cat, the ferocious Lady Jane. She not only suggests the traditional demonic familiar, she also appears to function as a symbolic expression of her master's character. Krook parades her ferocity with great satisfaction:

> "Hi! Show 'em how you scratch. Hi! Tear, my lady!" said her master.
>
> The cat leaped down, and ripped at a bundle of rags with her tigerish claws, with a sound that it set my teeth on edge to hear. (BH, p. 50)

Significantly, the animal goes into action only at her master's express command. As he proudly tells Esther after Lady Jane has savaged the rags, "She'd do as much for anyone if I was to set her on" (BH, p. 52); later, he assures Miss Flite that the cat would not harm the old woman's pet birds "unless I [Krook] told her to it" (BH, p. 199).

Lady Jane is something much more than a mere cat, just as Miss Flite's pets, with their symbolic names, are obviously much more than mere birds.[12] As the mad old woman, who in her madness sometimes sees more clearly than the conventionally sane, tells Esther, "'I half-believe, sometimes, that she is no cat'" (BH, p. 56). Cat and man are somehow one. The cat's "natural cruelty" towards the birds is sharpened, according to Miss Flite, "'by a jealous fear of their regaining their liberty'" (BH, p. 56), while similar life-denying and destructive impulses are implied by Krook's macabre passion for entombing bagfulls of women's hair in his cellar.[13] When Ada and Esther visit Krook's shop, one is terrorized by the old man, the other by Lady Jane. Krook frightens Ada by reaching out to stroke her hair with a menacing gesture, while the cat glares at Esther so fiercely that the girl feels "like a blood relative of the birds upstairs" (BH, p. 56). The mysterious merging of man and beast, as well as an explicitly demonic identification, is suggested by Tony Jobling's account of the cat's behaviour after his master's death:

> "She went leaping and bounding and tearing about that night like a dragon, and got out on the housetop, and roamed about up there for a fortnight. . . . Did you ever see such a brute? Looks as if she knew all about it, don't she. Almost looks as if she was Krook. Shoohoo! Get out, you goblin!" (BH, p. 560)

The reference to the dragon evokes the earlier description of Krook with smoke coming out of his mouth, while our perception of both cat and man as ultimately demonic receives confirmation in the goblin image.

Krook then is a dragon, and the Smallweeds are Satanic imps, but compared with the other two devil figures in Bleak House, both are relatively homely, familiar types and not particularly frightening. Krook belongs to the world of the fairy-tale, while there is an element of fierce, but real, comedy in the depiction of the Smallweeds. Tulkinghorn and Vholes, the remaining two devils, are, however, both much less substantial and much more terrifying exemplars of evil. Both must ultimately be regarded as demonic, not because they are associated with the usual devil-paraphernalia of smoke and fire, familiars and imps, but because both exhibit evil in its ultimate moral reality as privation--darkness, nothingness and death.

Mr. Tulkinghorn is associated with imagery which Frye identifies as characteristically demonic in connotation, imagery of "winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life and old age"[14] the antithesis of the goodness and life archetypally represented by "spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigor and youth."[15] Tulkinghorn's chambers are a couple of rooms in a decayed mansion where "lawyers lie like maggots in a nut" (BH, p. 130), and Dickens's description both of the house and of the street on which it is located creates a powerful atmosphere of petrifaction and decay, darkness, sterility and death:

> It is a dull street under the best conditions; where the two long rows of houses stare at each other with that severity, that half-a-dozen of its greatest mansions seem to have been slowly stared into stone, rather than originally built in that material. It is a street of such dismal grandeur, so determined not to condescend to liveliness, that the doors and windows hold a gloomy state of their own in black paint and dust, and the echoing mews have a dry and massive appearance, as if they were reserved to stable the stone chargers of noble statues. Complicated garnish of iron-work entwines itself over the flights of steps in this awful street; and, from these petrified bowers extinguishers for obsolete flambeaux gasp at the upstart gas. Here and there a weak little iron hoop . . . retains its place among the rusty foliage, sacred to the memory of departed oil. (BH, p. 653)

The atmosphere is explicitly established by the adjectives: dull, dismal, gloomy, black, echoing and awful. The houses have been "stared into stone," and are garnished with petrified bowers of rusty iron work--hard, metallic travesties of living plants. Death is suggested in the "gasping" extinguishers and the weak little iron hoops "sacred to the memory of the departed oil," as well as by the black doors and blank and dusty windows. Indoors, the atmosphere is so hostile to life and freshness, that "a breeze from the country that had lost its way [took] flight, and [made] a blind hurry to rush out again" (BH, p. 305).

Tulkinghorn himself is an old man, "aged without experience of genial youth" (BH, p. 583). He is "the dingy London bird" (BH, p. 583), "the crow who was out late" (BH, p. 132), a predator who uses his secret knowledge of others to intimidate and dominate. Most of all, he is darkness. Clad in dull black clothing which is "mute, close, irresponsive to any glancing light" (BH, p. 11), his dress "is like himself" (BH, p. 11). In his relentless pursuit of the brilliant Lady Dedlock, he is blackness threatening to engulf her light, "a dark object closing up her view" (BH, p. 660), "an indistinct form . . . bigger and blacker than before" (BH, p. 657).

His hatred of Lady Dedlock, which he conceals behind a mask of humble deference, is occasioned in part by a jealous enmity of the light she seems to embody,[16] but partly also by a deeply-rooted misogyny. He despises women, holding that they were created "to give trouble the whole world over" (BH, p. 585). This Satan-like grudge against the opposite sex[17] helps to suggest a demonic identity which is also hinted at in his introduction to the reader as "the old gentleman" (BH, p. 11), one of the traditional titles of the devil, as readers of Oliver Twist will recall. An even more explicit suggestion of his identity is contained in a curious little exchange between Grandfather Smallweed and Trooper George. Old Smallweed, whom the lawyer employs to carry out some of the more unsavoury details of his schemes, threatens George with "my friend in the city" (BH, p. 297), to which George retorts, "The name of your friend in the city begins with a 'D,' comrade" (BH, p. 298). Some time later, Smallweed appears to confirm George's suspicion about the true identity of his "friend," when he tells the trooper to "go to the devil . . . go to my lawyer" (BH, p. 481). Such pointed indications of Tulkinghorn's devil nature are, however, less important than the general atmosphere of evil and darkness in which he moves.

If Tulkinghorn is the embodiment of a principle of darkness, Vholes, Richard's lawyer, is a walking symbol of evil as privation. Tall, skeletal, diseased, and buttoned up in black from head to foot he is perhaps the most sinister and terrifying figure in the novel:

> Mr. Vholes--a sallow man with pinched lips that looked as if they were cold, a red eruption here and there upon his face, tall and thin, about fifty years of age, high-shouldered and stooping. Dressed in black, black-gloved and buttoned to the chin, there was nothing so remarkable in him as a lifeless manner, and a slow, fixed way he had of looking at Richard. (BH, p. 533)

His home is "an earthy cottage situated in a damp garden" (BH, p. 555), and his chambers are as narrow, dark and musty as the grave:

> Three feet of knotty-floored dark passage bring the client to Mr. Vholes's jet black door, in an angle profoundly dark on the brightest midsummer morning, and encumbered by a tall black bulk-head of cellerage staircase, against which belated civilians generally strike their brows. Mr. Vholes's chambers are on so small a scale, that one clerk can open the door without getting off his stool, while the other who elbows him at the same desk, has equal facilities for poking the fire. A smell as of unwholesome sheep, blending with the smell of must and dust, is referable to the nightly (and often daily) consumption of mutton fat in candles, and to the fretting of parchment forms and skins in greasy drawers. The atmosphere is otherwise stale and close. (BH, p. 547)

Vholes is Death.[18] He drives a gig harnessed to a "pale gaunt horse" (BH, p. 535), and his legal work is described as "making hay of the grass which is flesh" (BH, p. 548). He is the darkness of the shadow of death; as Esther watches him drive off to London with Richard, she imagines with a shudder "his long thin shadow . . . passing over all the sunny landscape between us and London, chilling the seed in the ground as it glided along" (BH, p. 617). He is also Death as the nothingness which is evil's ultimate reality. Like Milton's figure of Death in Paradise Lost, who "Grinned horrible a ghastly smile to hear / His famine should be filled,"[19] he is a void yearning to be filled. He watches his client hungrily, "as if he were making a lingering meal upon him with his eyes" (BH, p. 550), and scarcely seems to exist at all, except as appetite. As he extends his "dead glove" to Esther, it seems to her that it "scarcely seemed to have any hand in it" (BH, p. 617). He disappears from the novel as Richard learns that his Chancery suit has ended in ruin:

> He gave one gasp as if he had swallowed the last morsel of his client, and his black buttoned up unwholesome figure glided away to the low door at the end of the Hall. (BH, p. 867)

The reference to the "low door" suggests that he returns to the grave from which he comes.

Krook, Vholes, Tulkinghorn and the Smallweeds, for all their malevolence and demonic characteristics, are not, however, solely responsible for all the evil depicted in the novel. Each instead functions as the agent, and is therefore subordinate to the larger evil of Chancery, a demonic reality too vast and amorphous to be expressed in any metaphor more distinct than the fog. Each one of these devil figures is involved in one way or another with the operation of the Court, as well as being linked with one another. Tulkinghorn and Vholes are actual Chancery lawyers; the Smallweeds do odd jobs for Tulkinghorn and discover the final will in Jarndyce versus Jarndyce; Krook is Grandmother Smallweed's brother and runs a marine stores shop next to Lincoln's Inn that specializes in collecting waste paper and old legal documents from the Court. Dickens suggests their identity as demonic agents of the Court by repeating in their portraits the imagery of mud and fog, darkness and muddle which characterizes the Court of Chancery itself. In doing so, he establishes the demonic nature of the Court.

Krook and his shop, for example, are clearly meant to be seen as symbolic projections of the Lord Chancellor and his Court of Chancery:

> "He is called among the neighbours the Lord Chancellor. His shop is called the Court of Chancery." (BH, p. 51)

Krook both accepts and explains the identification:

> "You see I have so many things here, . . . of so many kinds, and all, as the neighbours think (but they know nothing), wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that that's why they have given me and my place a christening. And I have so many old parchmentses [sic] and papers in my stock. And I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all's fish that comes to my net. And I can't abear to part with anything I once lay hold of (or so my neighbours think, but what do they know?) or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me. That's the way I've got the ill name of Chancery. I don't mind. I go to see my noble and learned brother pretty well every day, when he sits in the Inn. He don't notice me, but I notice him. There's no great odds betwixt us. We both grub on in a muddle." (BH, p. 52)

His shop represents Chancery stripped of all its spurious dignity and revealed for what it is. It is littered with legal debris: tattered law-books, dog-eared law papers, worn out document bags, rags "which might have been counsellors' gowns and bands torn up," and bones which Richard fancies are "the bones of clients" (BH, p. 50). A "one-legged wooden scale hanging without any counterpoise from a beam" (BH, p. 50) functions as an ironic symbol of the scales of justice, while a picture of a red paper mill, pasted up in the window, anticipates Gridley's description of being in Chancery as "being ground to bits in a slow mill" (BH, p. 53).

The fog, Dickens's principal metaphor for Chancery's evil, appears in most of the portraits of these demonic agents of the Court. The "foggy glory" (BH, p. 2) which surrounds the head of the Lord Chancellor is echoed in the "mysterious halo" (BH, p. 11) with which Mr. Tulkinghorn is encircled, while the misty atmosphere of the courtroom reappears in the haziness of the old lawyer's chambers, where all things are resolving into dust (BH, p. 305). The Smallweeds, grubbing through piles of documents in a cloud of dust, suggest much the same thing, while Mr. Vholes appears to be capable of generating his own private fog: his "black dye was so deep that it had quite steamed before the fire, diffusing a very unpleasant perfume" (BH, p. 617).

Krook is right when he tells Tulkinghorn that the neighbours are wrong to suppose that Nemo has sold himself to the devil: "you and I know better--he don't buy" (BH, p. 136). He "don't buy" because he does not need to. As the opening chapters of Bleak House clearly reveal, the devil is already in control of most of the world of the novel. Characters like Krook, Vholes, Tulkinghorn and the Smallweeds help us to understand the moral significance of the forces at work in the world of Bleak House. The fog at the heart of the evil is so impenetrable that it is only as we move a little way out from the centre that we begin to see the evil assuming definite shape in the form of the Court's demonic agents.

The evidence of a demonic presence at work in the world of Bleak House is too compelling to be ignored. Ironically, however, that is precisely what some of the major characters in the novel attempt to do. John Jarndyce, a man of instinctive and profound compassion, is torn between the compulsion to relieve suffering and the longing to pretend it does not exist. In spite of genuine personal experience of the reality of evil (he is one of the principals in Jarndyce versus Jarndyce), he struggles to maintain a sentimental faith in the ultimate goodness, even innocence of his fellow man. Because he is neither stupid nor insensitive, he must withdraw from the world in order to preserve his illusions. Bleak House, with its flower gardens and warm fires, is his frail bastion against the world--frail because evil insists on making its presence known even there, forcing him, from time to time, to retreat to the Growlery in order to give vent to indignation he can no longer deny. Within the safe enclosure of the Growlery, he can admit to himself that evil is a reality, that Chancery is "an infernal country dance of costs and fees and nonsense and corruption, as was never dreamed of in the wildest visions of a Witch's Sabbath" (BH, p. 95). He also thinks, however, that "wisdom" lies in "keep[ing] to the bright side of the picture" (BH, p. 97) and confides to Esther that Chancery is one of the "things [he] never talk[s] about, or even think[s] about, excepting in the Growlery" (BH, p. 97).

Unwilling to acknowledge the existence of evil, but at the same time acutely aware of suffering around him, he tries to conceal the source of his distress in a feeble fiction about his discomfort being due to the effects of the east wind:

> He used the pretence to account for any disappointment he could not conceal, rather than . . . blame the real cause of it, or disparage or depreciate anyone. (BH, p. 80)

He is a secret philanthropist who carries his aversion to being thanked to absurd lengths:

> Ada dimly remembered to have heard her mother tell, when she was a

> very little child, that he [Mr. Jarndyce] had once done her an act of uncommon generosity, and that on going to his house to thank him, he happened to see her through a window coming to the door, and immediately escaped by the back gate, and was not heard of for three months. (BH, p. 61)

Mr. Jarndyce is uncomfortable in the presence of gratitude, partly because he does not like to admit to himself that he lives in a world where kindness and decency are extraordinary qualities, worthy of special recognition, but partly too, because he knows his motives are not entirely disinterested. The knowledge that someone is suffering pains and grieves him; he can only relieve his own misery by trying to end the other's pain. One notes that although he is deeply involved in many charitable schemes, he tries, whenever possible, to avoid any direct contact with the beneficiaries. He is for many years Esther's anonymous benefactor, a generous contributor to the pointless and impersonal philanthropies of Mrs. Jellyby, and Mrs. Pardiggle's patron in her misguided schemes to bring enlightenment to the brickyard. Although the brickyard is within the immediate vicinity of Bleak House, Jarndyce prefers to work through an intermediary; similarly, when he suspects that the Jellyby children are being neglected, he arranges, without giving his motives, for his wards to stay with Mrs. Jellyby. Their report makes him acutely uneasy:

> "The little Jellybys," said Richard . . . "are really--I can't help expressing myself strongly, sir--in a devil of a state."
>
> "She means well," said Mr. Jarndyce, hastily. "The wind's in the east."
>
> "It was in the north, sir, as we came down," observed Richard.
>
> "My dear Rick," said Mr. Jarndyce, poking the fire; "I'll take an oath it's either in the east or going to be. I am always conscious of an uncomfortable sensation now and then when the wind is blowing in the east."
>
> "Rheumatism, sir?" said Richard.
>
> "I dare say it is, Rick. I believe it is. And so the little Jell--I had my doubts about 'em--are in a--oh, Lord, yes, it's easterly!" (BH, p. 64)

He waits eagerly for reassurance:

> "Those little Jellybys. Couldn't you--didn't you--now if it had rained sugar-plums, or three-cornered raspberry tarts, or anything of that sort!" (BH, 64)

The news that the children have received two or three days of Esther's maternal concern is sufficient to restore his peace of mind. Jarndyce's reluctance to come to grips with the root causes of the pain that causes him such anxiety leads him into ultimately futile attempts to apply sticking plaster where nothing less than radical surgery is required. In this, he is a lot like Mr. Snagsby, who dispenses half crowns with a kind of frantic largesse.

Mr. Jarndyce tries to create, in Bleak House, the illusion of a paradisal world. The presence of the seemingly innocent Harold Skimpole within his household helps to sustain the illusion. Skimpole, in reality the middle-aged father of a large family, is superficially child-like in both appearance and outlook. A "little bright creature with a rather large head" (BH, p. 69), he seems to Jarndyce to be "a perfect child" in his "simplicity, and freshness and enthusiasm, and . . . fine guileless ineptitude for all worldly affairs" (BH, p. 67); a judgement enthusiastically endorsed by Skimpole himself ("'In this family we are all children, and I am the youngest'" [BH, p. 597]). Harold prattles merrily about his utter inability to grasp such grown-up concepts as time, money, work or responsibility. Trained to be a doctor, he refuses to practise, a significant act in a novel which frequently employs disease imagery as a metaphor for evil. His concept of the world of innocence, a state exempt from the curse of work or competition, emerges in his amusing disquisition on the bee:

> He didn't at all see why the busy Bee should be proposed as a model

> to him . . . He must say he thought a Drone the embodiment of a pleasanter and wiser idea. The Drone said, unaffectedly, "You will excuse me, I really cannot attend to the shop! I find myself in a world in which there is so much to see, and so short a time to see it in, that I must take the liberty of looking about me and begging to be provided for by somebody who doesn't want to look about him." This appeared to Mr. Skimpole to be the Drone philosophy, and he thought it a very good philosophy. (BH, p. 93)

He appears to exhibit not only the innocent spontaneity and enthusiasm of childhood, but to enjoy as well unfallen man's sense of unity with all creation. A dun from an indignant baker is summarily and wittily dismissed:

> "Now, my good man, however our business capacities may vary, we are all children of one great mother, Nature. On this blooming summer morning here you see me . . . with flowers before me, fruit upon the table, the cloudless sky above me, the air full of fragrance, contemplating Nature. I entreat you, by our common brotherhood, not to interpose between me and a subject so sublime, the absurd figure of an angry baker." (BH, p. 599)

Harold and Nature, he would have us believe, are at one.

Jarndyce is as eager as the young Dickens was to convince himself that innocence can be preserved, that the fall is not an universal reality. The more Jarndyce is forced to notice pain and suffering, the more tenaciously he clings to Skimpole as a foundation for optimism. It seems to Esther that Skimpole's "off-hand professions of childishness and carelessness were a great relief to my guardian . . . since to find one perfectly undesigning and candid man among many opposites, could not fail to give him pleasure" (BH, p. 204). Skimpole is a necessary prop for Jarndyce's sentimental blindness.

Skimpole of course is an obvious hypocrite. His apparent innocence is a mask for cold-blooded calculation and deliberate irresponsibility. But he represents something ultimately much more sinister than simple selfishness. A parody of childhood[20] and innocence, he is part of the larger pattern of demonic reversal which figures so prominently in the novel, a perverse pattern in which a middle-aged man pretends to himself and others that he is a little child, the wolves of Chancery pretend to be shepherds,[21] and law itself becomes the instrument of chaos. Even Skimpole's extraordinarily youthful appearance is suggestive of something unhealthy and unnatural. In spite of his and Jarndyce's insistence that he is a child, to Esther he appears to be "a damaged young man," "a romantic youth who had undergone some unique process of depreciation" (BH, p. 69). The disordered and run-down condition of his home is a reflection (along with all the other bleak houses of the novel)[22] of the chaos which originates in Chancery:

> It was in a state of dilapidation quite equal to our expectations. Two or three of the area railings were gone, the water butt was broken; the knocker was loose; the bell-handle had been pulled off a long time, to judge from the rusty state of the wire; and dirty footprints on the steps were the only signs of its being inhabitated. (BH, p. 594)

Decay and emptiness are characteristic of Skimpole. Behind the facade of gaiety and wit lies a total absence of human feeling--and something worse. Skimpole is able to discuss the plight of the little Coavineses with cheerful unconcern, and to admit to his double role in the removal of Jo from Bleak House and the delivering of Richard into the hands of Vholes without a tinge of remorse. With massive egocentricity, and in a kind of parody foreshadowing of Esther's eventual enlightenment, he explains to her that her illness has been good for him. It has helped him to "understand the mixture of good and evil in the world now; [he feels] he appreciates health more, when somebody else [is] ill, [doesn't] know but what it might be in the scheme of things that

A should squint to make B happier in looking straight, or that C should carry a wooden leg to make D better satisfied with his flesh and blood in a silk stocking" (BH, p. 522). In this last we see the demonic obverse of innocence--evil battening on the suffering of others.

The counterforce to the demonic is embodied in people like George Rouncewell, Mrs. Bagnet,[23] and most significantly in Esther. They are characterized by images of sunshine, tears and growing things, images which Dickens has used consistently throughout his career to suggest life, health and goodness. Trooper George, radiant with strength and health, "as punctual as the sun" (BH, p. 341), and deeply tanned by it, with "bright dark eyes" (BH, p. 341), "no head for papers" (BH, p. 379) and a deep love for children, animals and the countryside, is described by Mr. Jarndyce as combining "the might of a giant" with the "gentleness of a child" (BH, p. 701). In his simplicity and instinctive compassion he resembles the innocents of Dickens's earlier novels, but Dickens uses him to illustrate the inadequacy of simple innocence to combat evil. George, on the basis of strong circumstantial evidence, is wrongly accused of the murder of Tulkinghorn. At first he stubbornly refuses to make any defence. Proudly conscious of his innocence, and unwilling to compromise his moral purity by having anything to do with the corrupt world of lawyers and the law, he tries to dissociate himself psychologically from the event, and relies upon his innocence to protect him:

> "I have stated to the magistrates, 'Gentlemen, I am as innocent of this charge as yourselves; what has been stated against me in the way of fact is perfectly true; I know no more about it.' I intend to continue stating that, sir. What more can I do? It's the truth." (BH, p. 704)

Lawyers, he says, are for guilty men:

> "Suppose I had killed him . . . what should I have done as soon as I was hard and fast here. Got a lawyer." (BH, p. 706)

But while heaven might protect its own in the less complex worlds of Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop, Bleak House is a world of much greater moral ambiguity. The luxury of selecting one's weapons on the basis of their moral purity is one that George cannot afford, as Mrs. Bagnet angrily points out:

> " . . . it's enough to drive a person wild to hear you. You won't be got off this way, and you won't be got off that way--what do you mean by such picking and choosing. It's stuff and nonsense, George."
>
> "Don't be severe upon me in my misfortune, Mrs. Bagnet," said the trooper lightly.
>
> "Oh! Bother your misfortunes!" cried Mrs. Bagnet, "if they don't make you more reasonable than that comes to. I never was so ashamed in my life to hear a man talk folly, as I have been to hear you talk this day to the present company." (BH, p. 708)

"'It won't do,'" she tells Mrs. Rouncewell, "'to have truth and justice on his side; he must have law and lawyers'" (BH, p. 747). Innocence, in the fallen world of Bleak House, is no longer the potent shield against evil that it was in Dickens's earlier and more optimistic novels. George is only finally released through the intervention of Inspector Bucket, a morally ambiguous figure[24] who has, in the past, served Mr. Tulkinghorn.

The whole problem of innocence, its nature and characteristics, the possibility of its survival, the difficulty of distinguishing the genuine article from the counterfeit version, is one which constantly fascinates Dickens, as we have seen. George Rouncewell's adventures with the law illustrate some aspects of the problem, as does Dickens's dissection of Skimpole's seeming innocence. Esther Summerson, however, is of far more importance than either of these two. As a literary creation, she was for a long time a favourite target for Dickens's critics who detected in her portrait evidence of artistic failure. A reviewer in the Rambler in 1854 dismissed her as a "prodigious bore;"[25] a century later, Leonard Deens characterized her as "a particularly perverse and sentimental expression of Dickens's life-long over-valuation of the experience of the child."[26] William Axton, in an article defending Esther--and Dickens--sums up the traditional view:

> Although Charles Dickens clearly intended Esther Summerson for the heroine of Bleak House, many readers have found her characterization ambiguous, if not repugnant. Esther's portion of the narrative has to them a disingenuous ring. The picture she paints of herself is too good to be true, or at least, too good to be credible. Professing her small worth, Esther contrives to allude to her virtues at every turn; insisting on her plainness, she is preoccupied with the question of her good looks to the very last words of the novel. Avowedly reluctant to speak ill of anyone, Esther is a master of ironic commentary; she damns with faint praise, employs paraphrase with devastating effect, and claims to be perplexed by those whose conduct she condemns. For these and other reasons, many readers find Esther a dreadful parody of the ideal Victorian woman.[27]

In recent years, however, a number of critics, beginning with Broderick and Grant,[28] and including the Leavises,[29] Alex Zwerdling,[30] Lawrence Frank,[31] and of course, William Axton, have asserted that the portrait of Esther is of far greater psychological complexity than many readers had suspected. Drawing to a large extent on the insights of this group of critics, I will attempt to show how Dickens uses the figure of Esther Summerson to make a number of significant observations which drastically modify his earlier concept of the inherent innocence of man.

In Dickens's earliest work, as we have seen, the figure of the innocent child or child-like protagonist becomes the focus against which the devils of the novels direct their attacks. Realizing perhaps the impossibility of combining innocence, an essentially passive quality, with the kind of active intelligence required to combat evil, Dickens turned his attention in mid-career to characters like Martin Chuzzlewit, Mr. Dombey and David Copperfield. All these characters, however, are male. Girls and women (provided they are young and pretty) still retain for the more mature Dickens something of the aura of Little Nell, a purity and passivity which makes them natural victims. Flo Dombey is such a figure, as is, to a lesser degree, Ruth Pinch. The unsentimentalized depiction of Dora Copperfield's irritating helplessness might seem to indicate that Dickens had finished with the type, were it not for the presence of Agnes Wickfield, who, for all her wisdom, is still essentially George Orwell's "legless angel."[32] Dickens's creation of Esther Summerson represents a significant advance in his development in that she embodies his first attempt to depict a young _woman_ struggling with problems of guilt and identity, a woman who can be seen to undergo processes of change and growth. Of even greater importance is the examination of the problem of original sin which her portrait involves.

Throughout Dickens's career, certain stock figures tend to reappear in his novels. The innocent child and the demonic villain are obvious instances, but another important recurring character is the religious bigot who espouses the doctrine of original sin with particular ferocity. Mrs. Clennam, in _Little Dorrit_, who hands young Arthur a tract which "commenced business with the poor child by asking him in its title, 'why he was going to perdition?'" (_LD_, p. 29), is one example, while Mr. Pumblechook, who agrees with Hubble that boys are "naterally wicious" (_GE_, p. 23), is a comic variety of the type.

The Murdstones, who hold that all children are little vipers, and Miss Barbary, who teaches Esther that it would have been better had she never been born, are also representative of this view. Dickens rejects this position with great indignation, and in his earlier novels insists upon the innocence and sanctity of childhood. As he examines his own position, however, he gradually comes to realize, as we have seen, that simple innocence, as it is defined by those early novels, is not only impossible to preserve in a world increasingly perceived as evil, but morally inadequate as well. He had, as early as The Old Curiosity Shop, in his portrait of Dick Swiveller, shown some interest in exploring the complexities of characters who were neither wholly good nor wholly evil, and in Martin Chuzzlewit and David Copperfield investigated that area with even greater thoroughness. With Esther Summerson, he presents us with a subtle psychological and moral portrait of a woman who gradually comes to realize that a realistic recognition of human imperfection, far from being grounds for despair, is actually the necessary foundation for maturity.

Esther is the most important of all the characters in the novel who embody life-affirming qualities in opposition to the life-denying values of Chancery. This is to be seen most obviously in her function as housekeeper and surrogate mother to Peepy, Caddy, Prince, and Charley, as she sets against the chaos and sterility of Chancery a humane order which fosters growth. This aspect of Esther has been dealt with so extensively by several critics that I do not think it necessary to go into it any further.[33] What is more significant, for purposes of my argument, is that in her capacity as a representative of a regenerative force, she is not herself without flaws. The task of opposing evil, entrusted in the earlier novels to the pure hands of a Nell or Oliver-like innocent, is in Bleak House assigned to a character who is herself in need of redemption. She has, in fact, more in common with David Copperfield than those earlier protagonists; and in some ways, her position is even more extreme than David's. David enjoys at least a brief period as mamma's innocent darling, but Esther labours under a crushing sense of guilt and personal unworthiness from the very outset of her career. As a little child, she is informed that she ought never to have been born (BH, p. 17), and when she tries to find out why, what terrible crime she has committed, crying, "'. . . what did I do to her [her mother]? How did I lose her? Why am I so different from other children, and why is it my fault . . . ?'" (BH, p. 17) she is told only that her sin has something to do with her birth, and something to do with being female:

> "Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers. The time will come--and soon enough--when you will understand this better and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can . . . For yourself, unfortunate girl, orphaned and degraded from the first of these evil anniversaries, pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written . . .
>
> Submission, self-denial, and diligent work, are the preparations for a life begun with such a shadow on it. You are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born, like them, in common sinfulness and wrath. You are set apart." (BH, p. 18)

Miss Barbary implies a number of things in this speech, none of which are lost on the child. First of all, Esther has no right to exist at all; if she is to escape the punishment which, "according to what is written" ought to be hers, she must strive to become as unobtrusive, as self-effacing as possible. With the literalness of childhood, Esther interprets "self-denial" as just that, a suppression and denial of her basic identity, not only a denial of her own dreams and aspirations, but a denial of her intelligence, her beauty, her own real goodness. Secondly, Miss Barbary's words imply a mysterious connection between femininity and corruption. Mother and daughter are joined by a mutual disgrace that apparently has something to do with the act of giving birth. Esther's birthday is observed as a day of shame. No mention is made of a father (except later, as the terrifying Father-God who denies forgiveness), and Barbary stresses that when Esther becomes a woman, she will experience the disgrace with greater intensity. Esther is "frozen" by her aunt's bitter denunciation, and her choice of that word to record her response is significant. Miss Barbary, with those words, puts the finishing touches on the destruction of the child's "sense of inner goodness,"[34] with results even more drastic than Mr. Murdstone's effects on David. Esther's basic conception of herself is "frozen" at this moment. From this point on, she will perceive herself, even as she struggles to deny it, as morally tainted and dangerous. Not until she experiences the thaw which takes place near the end of her heavily symbolic pilgrimage to the side of her dead mother will that frozen self melt, permitting her to begin the process of integration.

Feeling that her only security lies in "submission and self-denial," as her aunt declared, she tries to construct a self which will "repair the fault I had been born with" (BH, p. 18). This new self will be "industrious, contented, and kind-hearted," and will try to "win love," by "doing some good to someone" (BH, p. 18). This program is only a slightly softened version of Miss Barbary's "submission and self-denial," in that it still is totally other-regarding and makes no allowances for any kind of self-expression. Esther tries to earn love;

not only does she deny all personal aspirations other than the craving for affection, she even denies personal attributes like youth, beauty, and her manifest intelligence:

> I am not clever . . . I have not by any means a quick understanding . . . I was not charming. (BH, p. 15)

Her self-abnegation is carried to such extremes that she cannot even accept the gratitude her kindness at Greenleaf School has earned her; instead, she thanks her fellows for their "forbearance" in putting up with her. Her inability to accept justly-deserved praise (which she is also very careful to record) has made many readers reject Esther as impossibly disingenuous and coy, as already noted.[35] Such readers assume that Dickens intends us to see her as saintly in her selflessness; unable to do so, they reject her instead with irritation. Dickens, however, makes it amply clear that her self-abnegation is not saintly, but sick, in that it involves her in a massive denial of reality.

As William Axton observes [36] she is a naturally perceptive observer, but extremely reluctant to draw the conclusions which obviously follow from what she describes. She has been told, for instance, that Mrs. Jellyby is "very good to take such pains about a scheme for the benefit of the Natives" (BH, p. 42). As she observes the evidence of neglect and disorder everywhere apparent in the Jellyby household, and struggles to reconcile that with Mrs. Jellyby's reputation for benevolence, rather than assert her own judgement, she retreats helplessly into a confession of confusion:

> ". . . it quite confuses me. I want to understand it, and I can't understand it at all." (BH, p. 42)

She could, but she will not let herself. She is similarly "confused" by Harold Skimpole's fake innocence, and old Mr. Turveydrop's pose as the gracious benefactor, which she describes as "the most confusing sight I ever saw." (BH, p. 328).

Although the self that Esther presents to the world is remarkable mostly for its extreme docility and passiveness, an intimation that there is another Esther, a potentially powerful personality capable of expressing itself with strength and even something like imperiousness, is hinted at in her surprisingly haughty response to the impudent Mr. Guppy:

> "Get up from that ridiculous position immediately, sir, or I will be obliged to break my implied promise and ring the bell!" (BH, p. 124)

This is an Esther, however, whom one scarcely ever sees. For the most part, Esther quickly crushes any hints of rebellion in herself against the code of "submission and self-denial." She is suddenly overcome by pangs of grief as she watches the sleeping Ada happily dreaming about Rick:

> Ada praised Richard more to me, that night, than ever she had praised him yet. She went to sleep with a little bracelet he had given her clasped on her arm. I fancied she was dreaming of him when I kissed her cheek after she had slept an hour, and saw how tranquil and happy she looked.
>
> For I was so little inclined myself to sleep that night that I sat up working. It would not be worth mentioning for its own sake, but I was wakeful and rather low-spirited. I don't know why. At least, I don't think I know why. At least, perhaps I do, but I don't think it matters. (BH, p. 235)

Esther, however, will not allow herself such a "selfish" response, and these faint stirrings of dissatisfaction are firmly repressed:

> . . . I made up my mind to be so dreadfully industrious that I would leave myself not a moment's leisure to be low-spirited. For I naturally said, "Esther! You to be low-spirited. You!" And it really was time to say so, for I--yes, I really did see myself in the glass, almost crying. "As if you had anything to make you unhappy, instead of everything to make you happy, you ungrateful heart!" said I. (BH, p. 235)

(Esther frequently addresses herself in this fashion, and the habit is significant, in that it helps to emphasize the internal conflict between Esther's two selves, the surface Esther who is resigned to being "set apart," and a more normal personality that wants much more, but is seldom permitted expression.)

Esther is afraid of this second, buried self, as can be seen by the eagerness with which she accepts the identities imposed upon her by Ada, Rick, and Mr. Jarndyce. Soon after her arrival at Bleak House, they take to calling her "Old Woman, and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs. Shipton, and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden, . . . and so many names of that sort" Esther adds, significantly, "that my own name soon became quite lost among them" (BH, p. 98). All of these names, as William Axton[37] points out, are traditionally associated with sexually unattractive old women. Esther accepts them gratefully, because having been taught to associate femaleness with corruption, she fears her own sexuality. These names provide her with a harmless asexual identity safely beyond the temptations of the flesh. The housekeeper role is also important in this connection. It permits her to exercise a feminine function other than the more obviously sexual and hence more dangerous roles of wife and mother.

That the self-effacing Esther does have dreams and aspirations inconsistent with her persona as Dame Durden, however, is indicated in a number of ways. One notes the tears that follow after she rejects Guppy's proposal:

> [I] was so composed and cheerful that I thought I had quite dismissed this unexpected incident. But when I went upstairs to my own room, I surprised myself by beginning to laugh about it and then surprised myself still more by beginning to cry about it. In short, I was in a flutter for a little while; and felt as

> if an old chord had been more coarsely touched than it ever had been since the days of the dear old doll, long buried in the garden. (BH, p. 126)

The point, of course, is not that Esther would like to have accepted this unlikely suitor, but that his offer is a painful reminder of all that she thinks she must renounce. The self that still longs, rebelliously, for love and marriage, the self that is supposed to be safely buried like the doll, makes its presence known in her tears.

Because outright repression of that other self is not completely successful, Esther has to find other ways to deal with it. Her relationship with Ada is very important in this regard. Esther uses Ada as an alter ego on which to project emotions and desires she cannot afford to acknowledge in herself, much as David Copperfield does with Steerforth.[38] (This perhaps explains why Steerforth and Ada are described in vague, stereotypical terms; one tall, handsome and dashing, the other blond, beautiful and tender-hearted, with very little in the way of particularized, specific detail.) When she experiences increasing conflict between her longing for Allan Woodcourt and her sense of duty toward Mr. Jarndyce, she deals with it by projecting what is clearly her own emotional distress onto Ada, while she tries to lose herself in what she very accurately describes as a "desperate" busy-ness:

> . . . it came into my head that Ada was a little grieved--for me--by what I had told her about Bleak House.
>
> . . . .
>
> I was not grieved for myself: I was quite contented and quite happy. Still, that Ada might be thinking--for me, though I had abandoned all such thoughts [of Allan Woodcourt]--of what once was, but was now all changed, seemed so easy to believe, that I believed it.
>
> What could I do to reassure my darling? . . . Well! I could only be as brisk and busy as possible . . . I resolved to be doubly diligent and gay. So I went about the house humming all

> the tunes I knew; and I sat working and working in a desperate manner, and I talked and talked, morning, noon, and night. (BH, p. 686)

Carefully cultivating submission and self-denial in herself, she refers to Ada as "my own Pride" (BH, p. 441); insisting that she herself is unattractive, she calls Ada "my beauty" (BH, p. 613). While willing to risk disfigurement herself to nurse Charley, she refuses to permit Ada to make a similar sacrifice and goes to elaborate lengths to prevent her from coming into contact with the disease. Most telling of all is her perception of her place in the love affair between Rick and Ada:

> They brought a chair on either side of me, and put me in between them, and really seemed to have fallen in love with me, instead of one another; they were so confiding, and so trustful and so fond of me. They went on in their old wild way for a little while--I never stopped them; I enjoyed it too much myself. (BH, p. 178)

She looks forward to their marriage with eager anticipation:

> I was to be Ada's bridesmaid when they were married; I was to live with them afterwards; I was to keep all the keys of their house; I was to be made happy for ever and a day. (BH, p. 183)

But a vicarious experience of a love affair does not resolve the problem either, and when Allan Woodcourt gives evidence of being attracted to her, Esther experiences renewed conflict within herself. She is pleased and gratified by his attentions, as her secret cherishing of his gift of flowers reveals. That she would like to marry him is apparent in her obvious distress over his mother's heavy-handed hints as to Esther's marital unsuitability:

> She [Mrs. Woodcourt] talked so much about birth, that for a moment I half fancied, and with pain--but what an idle fancy to suppose that she could think or care what mine was. (BH, p. 239)

She is also, however, so terrified of the whole affair, which threatens to topple her Dame Durden identity, that she can scarcely bear to acknowledge, either to herself or anyone else, what is going on. Her speeches about Allan are so full of hesitancy, denial and qualification that the normally fluent Esther, at these points, turns into what Alex Zwerdling calls a "grammatical cripple."[39]

> We had a visitor next day; Mr. Allan Woodcourt came. He came to take leave of us; he had settled to do so beforehand. He was going to China, and to India, as a surgeon on board ship. He was to be away a long, long time.
>
> I believe--at least I know--that he was not rich . . . He was seven years older than I. Not that I need mention it, for it hardly seems to belong to anything.
>
> I think--I mean, he told us--that he had been in practice three or four years . . . He had been to see us several times altogether. We thought it a pity he should go away. Because he was distinguished in his art among those who knew it best, and some of the greatest men belonging to it had a high opinion of him.
>
> . . . .
>
> And so we gave him our hands, one after another--at least, they did--and I did; and so he put his lips to Ada's hand--and to mine; and so he went away upon his long, long voyage. (BH, p. 239)

Esther's predicament is essentially the same as David Copperfield's. She has been made to experience herself as guilty and worthless, and in a desperate effort at denial, she tries to bury that guilty self under layers of superimposed identities.[40] In one identity, she is Dame Durden, the asexual little housekeeper; in another, the wise old woman in whom young lovers like Rick and Ada, Caddy and Prince can safely confide. In yet another, she is somehow Ada the heroine of a romantic love story, and in an only partially formed and still emerging identity, she is the beautiful young girl whom Allan Woodcourt loves. Buried underneath all these, is still the Esther born in no "common sinfulness and wrath" but "set apart," "her mother's disgrace," the creature whose birthdays are "evil anniversaries."

It is no wonder that Esther falls ill, nor that, on the eve of doing so, she should be troubled by "a curious sense of fulness, as if I were becoming too large altogether" (BH, p. 440). The self she has struggled so diligently to suppress will be denied no longer, and in her illness it announces itself with a vengeance. The scarred face that looks back at her from the mirror is an undeniable manifestation of it. Esther insists repeatedly that she can accept her changed self with barely a qualm:

> I put my hair aside and looked at the reflection in the mirror; encouraged by seeing how placidly it looked at me . . . At first, my face was so strange to me, that I think I should have put my hands before it and started back, but for the encouragement I have mentioned. Very soon it became more familiar, and then I knew the extent of the alteration in it better than I had done at first. It was not like what I had expected; but I had expected nothing definite, and I dare say anything definite would have surprised me.
>
> I had never been a beauty, and had never thought myself one, but I had been very different from this. It was all gone now. Heaven was so good to me, that I could let it go with a few not bitter tears, and could stand there arranging my hair for the night quite thankfully. (BH, p. 504)

This air of humble resignation is supposed to make us think that Esther has stopped trying to run away from the self she fears, but I do not believe that it is really anything of the sort. In spite of all her statements implying submissive acceptance, I do not believe, for reasons I shall try to make clear, that Esther has really come to terms with herself at all.

I argued earlier that Ada was Esther's alter ego, a projection of an idealized version of the self Esther would like to be. But Ada is not Esther's only alter ego; Lady Dedlock is another, a projection of that passionate and sinful self with which Miss Barbary terrified the child.[41] Esther's first glimpse of her mother, whose identity I think we are supposed to believe Esther intuits but refuses to acknowledge, fills her with unreasoning panic:

> Shall I ever forget that rapid beating at my heart, occasioned by the look I met, as I stood up! Shall I ever forget the manner in which those handsome proud eyes seemed to spring out of their languour, and to hold mine! It was only a moment before I cast mine down--released again, if I may say so--on my book; but I knew the beautiful face quite well, in that short space of time. (BH, p. 250)

She is startled to find herself taken back in memory to her miserable childhood:

> . . . very strangely, there was something quickened within me, associated with the lonely days at my godmother's; yes, away even to the days when I had stood on tiptoe to dress myself at my little glass, after dressing my doll. And this, although I had never seen this lady's face before in all my life--I was quite sure of it--absolutely certain. . . . why her face should be in a confused way, like a broken glass to me, in which I saw scraps of old remembrances; and why I should be so fluttered and troubled (for I was still), by having casually met her eyes, I could not think. (BH, p. 250)

The link between Lady Dedlock and the guilty child of Esther's past is clearly suggested as Esther continues with a description of her response:

> Neither did I know the loftiness and haughtiness of Lady Dedlock's face, at all, in anyone. And yet I--I, little Esther Summerson, the child who lived a life apart, and on whose birthday there was no rejoicing--seemed to arise before my own eyes, evoked out of the past by some power in this fashionable lady . . . whom I knew perfectly well I had never seen until that hour. (BH, p. 250)

Later, the sound of Lady Dedlock's voice (which Ada mistakes for Esther's) calls up in Esther "innumerable pictures of myself" (BH, p. 254).

The point is clear. This haughty, passionate and powerful lady, the antithesis of the the humble, meek and submissive Esther, represents the self that Barbary said could only escape punishment through self-denial and submission. This interpretation is further supported by an episode during Esther's illness. In a fever-dream,[42] Esther sees "a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which I was one of the beads" "strung together somewhere in great black space" (BH, p. 489). Throughout the novel, as I have earlier noted, Lady Dedlock is frequently depicted as a glittering light set against darkness. She is also repeatedly described as part of "a brilliant and distinguished circle" (BH, pp. 153, 156, 159, 161). The "flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle" is Esther's dream image for Lady Dedlock, and also indicates her intuitive perception of the bond between them--"I was one of the beads" (BH, p. 489). Her understanding of that bond as one of shared guilt--"Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers" (BH, p. 17)--as well as her frantic desire to dissociate herself from it is contained in her plea "to be taken off from the rest . . . when it was such an inexplicable agony and misery to be part of the dreadful thing" (BH, p. 489)

Her rejection of the self represented by Lady Dedlock is further illustrated by her reaction to her mother's confession:

> when I saw her at my feet on the bare earth in her great agony of mind, I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I could never disgrace her by any trace of likeness; so that nobody could ever now look at me, and look at her, and remotely think of any near tie between us. (BH, p. 509)

Esther characteristically couches her words in tones of selfless concern for her mother, but the main point is her gratitude that "nobody could ever look at me, and look at her and remotely think of any near tie between us." The desire to distance herself as much as possible from her mother is a continuing factor in Esther's life from this time on:

> Knowing that my mere existence as a living creature was an unforeseen danger in her way, I could not always conquer that terror of myself which had seized me when I first knew the secret.

> At no time did I dare to utter her name. I felt as if I did not even dare to hear it. If the conversation anywhere when I was present, took that direction, as it sometimes naturally did, I tried not to hear--I mentally counted, repeated something that I knew, or went out of the room. I am conscious, now, that I often did these things when there can have been no danger of her being spoken of; but I did them in the dread I had of hearing anything that might lead to her betrayal, and to her betrayal through me. (BH, p. 591)

Esther is careful to attribute that "terror of myself" to concern for the safety of Lady Dedlock, but her admission that she experiences it even when there "can have been no danger" argues another cause.

Her sense of guilt, already very great, is further intensified by her discovery that she has been indirectly responsible for Miss Barbary's break with Mr. Boythorn:

> "O Guardian, what have I done!" I cried, giving way to my grief, "what sorrow have I innocently caused!" (BH, p. 605)

Although she tries to see it as a sorrow which she has "innocently caused," her realization that the mere fact of her birth has resulted in such pain strengthens her conviction that she ought never to have been born, and increases her sense of obligation with respect to Mr. Jarndyce:

> . . . when at last I lay down to sleep, my thought was how could I ever be busy enough, how could I ever be good enough, how in my little way could I ever hope to be forgetful enough of myself, devoted enough to him, and useful enough to others, to show him how I blessed and honoured him. (BH, p. 606)

Mr. Jarndyce himself inadvertently suggests how she might repay him in a way which will require her to become more "forgetful of myself" by asking her to marry him, and assures her in his letter of proposal that whether she accepts or not, she will always be "his bright Dame Durden and little housekeeper" (BH, p. 611). That this is a marriage which will require strenuous self-denial is indicated by the conflict

Esther experiences in herself before she can accept. She feels that gratitude will allow no other response:

> . . . he did not hint to me . . . That when my old face was gone from me, and I had no attractions, he could love me just as well as in my fairer days. That the discovery of my birth gave him no shock. That his generosity rose above my disfigurement, and my inheritance of shame. That the more I stood in need of such fidelity, the more firmly I might trust in him to the last.
>
> But I knew it. I knew it well now. It came upon me as the close of the benignant history I had been pursuing, and I felt that I had but one thing to do. To devote my life to his happiness was to thank him poorly, and what had I wished for the other night but some new means of thanking him? (BH, p. 611)

Her emotions, however, are hardly those the the happy prospective bride:

> Still I cried very much; not only in the fulness of my heart after reading the letter, not only in the strangeness of the prospect--for it was strange though I had expected the contents--but as if something for which there was no name or distinct idea were indefinitely lost to me. I was very happy, very thankful, very hopeful; but I cried very much. (BH, p. 611)

What is "indefinitely lost" is the hope of personal happiness which the buried self has stubbornly clung to. Marrying Mr. Jarndyce means confining herself forever to the drab Dame Durden identity. This is why it takes at least two weeks for Esther to compose her reply--"I tried over and over again in my own room at night, but I could not write an answer that began at all like a good answer" (BH, p. 613)--and why the neurotic busy-ness which she habitually uses as a refuge from personal unhappiness increases--"new reasons why I should be busy, busy, busy" (BH, p. 612).

It is not, however, Esther's sense of obligation alone which makes her finally agree to the marriage, strong though that is. This passionless arrangement with a man who looks and acts more like a father than a lover (indeed, Esther originally thought he was her father) will provide no outlet for that other, dangerous self whose energies can now be safely discharged through the identification with Ada.

But the attempt to achieve emotional gratification by living through Ada breaks down when Rick and Ada marry without Esther's knowledge, destroying her happy dream of being Ada's bridesmaid, living with them and being "made happy for ever and day" (BH, p. 183). Her grief when Ada leaves her to go and live with Rick is extreme:

> O how I cried! It almost seemed to me that I had lost my Ada forever. I was so lonely, and so blank without her, and it was so desolate to be going home with no hope of seeing her there, that I could get no comfort for a little while, as I walked up and down in a dim corner, sobbing and crying. (BH, p. 698)

She tries to console herself with an extraordinary night visit to the door of their room:

> I listened for a few moments, and in the musty rotting silence of the house, believed that I could hear the murmur of their young voices. I put my lips to the hearse-like panel of the door, as a kiss for my dear, and came quietly down again, thinking one of these days I would confess to the visit.
>
> And it really did me good . . . I somehow felt as if it had diminished the separation between Ada and me, and had brought us together again for those moments. I went back, not quite accustomed yet to the change, but all the better for that hovering about my darling. (BH, p. 699)

Ada's marriage represents the death, or so Esther interprets it, of the self she has projected onto her. The musty rotting silence and the hearse-like panel of the door suggest the tomb. This is interesting, because when Esther sees Allan just after becoming engaged to Mr. Jarndyce she says afterwards that "I felt for my old self as the dead may feel if they ever revisit these scenes. I was glad to be tenderly remembered, to be gently pitied, not to be quite forgotten" (BH, p. 626). Her actions outside the door are a farewell to the self she thinks has died, "tenderly remembered . . . . gently pitied, not to be quite forgotten."

Esther is in an impossible position. The guilty self she has always feared makes its presence known every time she looks in a mirror or thinks of her mother. The self that Allan loved is apparently dead; Rick and Ada have shut her out. She does not want to spend the rest of her life as Dame Durden, but thinks she has no alternative. She will not be able to reconcile all these conflicting identities until she learns to accept rather than deny herself. In this connection, her relationship with her mother is very important. The sentence which introduces Esther's first sight of her mother; "Enter not into judgement with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight--" (BH, p. 249) suggests what Esther is going to have to do. She must forgive Lady Dedlock because, joined as they are in mutual disgrace (the "dreadful thing" of Esther's dream), only then will she be able to forgive herself.

When Lady Dedlock reveals her identity, she cries:

> "O my child, my child, I am your wicked and unhappy mother! O try to forgive me!" (BH, p. 509)

Esther assures her that she does:

> I raised my mother up, praying and beseeching her not to stoop before me in such affliction and humiliation. I did so in broken and incoherent words; for, besides the trouble I was in, it frightened me to see her at my feet. I told her--or I tried to tell her--that if it were for me, her child, under any circumstances to take upon me to forgive her, I did it, and had done it, many many years. I told her that my heart overflowed with love for her; that it was natural love, which nothing in the past had changed, or could change. That it was not for me, then resting for the first time on my mother's bosom, to take her to account for having given me life; but that my duty was to bless her and receive her, though the whole world turned from her, and that I only asked her leave to do it. I held my mother in my embrace, and she held me in hers; and among the still woods in the silence

> of the summer day, there seemed to be nothing but our two troubled minds that was not at peace. (BH, p. 510)

But a close examination of the passage suggests another interpretation. First of all, the statement of forgiveness is introduced with qualification: "*if* it were for me . . . under the circumstances." The phrase, "resting for the first time on my mother's bosom," suggests a hidden resentment that it should be for the *first* time, a suggestion reinforced by the accusing tone of the words, "to take her to account for having given me life," and the identification of forgiveness with "duty."[43] It is also not inconceivable that the clause, "though the whole world turned from her," uttered at a time when Lady Dedlock seems to be in no particular danger from that, implies that this is what she really deserves. Finally, it would seem to me that if this scene were really one of reconciliation between mother and daughter, their "two troubled minds" would not be the only discordant note " among the still woods and silence of the summer day."

The scene recalls a parallel episode in *Great Expectations* in which Miss Havisham asks Pip's forgiveness and receives similar assurance that it is granted (*GE*, pp. 377-78). Both accounts dwell more on their subject's sins than the narrator's ability to overlook them. That Esther has forgiven neither her mother nor herself is indicated by that "terror of myself" which continues to haunt her, and by her exaggerated aversion to having anything to do with anything or anyone who has the slightest connection with Lady Dedlock.

What Esther is really struggling with is something very like the problem of original sin. Like the youthful Dickens, she appears to believe that the alternative to innocence is total depravity.

Haunted by the spectre of a self she cannot accept, a fallen self presented to her in such an intolerable light by her aunt that she is forced to deny it, she seeks refuge in an illusory world of innocence which part of her recognizes as illusion, but clings to all the same. Her marked confusion, which we have already observed, about the moral significance of Mrs. Jellyby, Harold Skimpole and Mr. Turveydrop is a symptom of a profound inner conflict she will not be able to resolve until she makes a conscious acknowledgement of both fallen world and fallen self. The artificial barriers which are supposed to separate the innocent paradise of Bleak House from the demonic world of slum and Chancery begin to crumble when Esther is struck down by the fever emanating from Tom-All-Alone's. Her initial reaction, however, is one of further denial as she retreats even more deeply into the Dame Durden identity and the fragile refuge of Bleak House:

> When our time came for returning to Bleak House again, we were punctual to the day, and were received with an over-powering welcome. I was perfectly restored to health and strength, and finding my housekeeping keys laid ready for me in my room, rang myself in as if I had been a new year with a merry little peal. "Once more, duty, duty, Esther," said I. (BH, p. 536)

Esther cannot accept the notion of herself as fallen because she has been made to feel that as such, she is uniquely sinful: "not born in common sinfulness and wrath, but set apart." The clue to a more realistic understanding of her predicament is suggested by that fragment of Psalm 143 which introduced her first encounter with Lady Dedlock:

> Enter not into judgement with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight--

The remainder of the verse, which Esther apparently could not hear in her emotional turmoil, concludes "for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." Esther's guilt is one which she shares with all mankind. She must learn to recognize that she, like everyone else, participates in the flawed nature of humanity and to accept her involvement in it.

The possibility of such a recognition is presented to her in the nightmare journey through the snow to which such a significant portion of the later chapters of her narrative is devoted. Esther experiences a symbolic descent into hell, into the world of corruption and death which Bleak House has tried to exclude. In this experience Esther is confronted with the moral reality of the world in inescapable terms and shown that there are no more places to hide.[44]

Esther's journey is both a descent into the fallen world and a quest whose object is the recovery of herself. In traditional formulations of the quest, the quester is usually accompanied by a guide,[45] and Bucket fulfills this role for Esther. He not only directs her through a labyrinth of streets and impassable roads, his cynical commentary acts as a necessary correction to her naivete. Playing Sam Weller to Esther's Pickwick, he explains the lies of the brickworkers to her, and advises her against being too trusting with servants:

> ". . . what you've always got to be careful of with servants is, who comes to see 'em; you never know what they're up to, if you don't know that. And another thing, my dear. Whenever you find a young man behind the kitchen door, you give that young man in charge on suspicion of being secreted in a dwelling house with an unlawful purpose." (BH, p. 774)

More significantly, he also teaches her how to recognize and deal with the kind of fake innocence exhibited by Harold Skimpole:

> "Now, Miss Summerson, I'll give you a piece of advice . . . . Whenever a person says to you that they are as innocent as can be

> in all concerning money, look well after your own money, for they are dead certain to collar it, if they can. Whenever a person proclaims to you, 'In worldly matters I'm a child,' you consider that that person is only a-crying off from being held accountable, and that you have got that person's number, and it's Number One. Now, I am not a poetical man myself . . . but I'm a practical one, and that's my experience. So's this rule. Fast and loose in one thing, Fast and loose in everything. I never knew it fail. No more will you. Nor no one. With that caution to the unwary, my dear, I take the liberty of pulling this here bell, and so go back to our business." (BH, p. 776)

Bucket delivers both these "cautions to the unwary" at the threshold of Bleak House. It is appropriate that Esther should receive them here, where she has tried to cultivate the illusion of a world where such caution is unnecessary.

The journey itself, which is intended to reveal to Esther the inescapable reality of the fallen world, begins as Bucket summons her from her London lodgings to accompany him on his search for Lady Dedlock through the streets of the city. Esther is no stranger to London, and throughout her narrative has recorded her impressions of it in terms which clearly suggest its identification with confusion, darkness, corruption and death, but in her earlier descriptions, the tone is that of the detached observer:

> I asked him [Guppy] whether there was a great fire anywhere? For the streets were so full of dense brown smoke that scarcely anything was to be seen.
>
> . . . .
>
> We drove slowly through the dirtiest and darkest streets that were ever seen in the world (I thought), and in such a distracting state of confusion that I wondered how the people kept their senses, until we passed into sudden quietude under an old gateway, and drove on through a silent square until we came to an odd nook in a corner, where there was an entrance up a steep broad flight of stairs, like an entrance to a church. And there really was a churchyard, outside under some cloisters, for I saw the grave-stones from the staircase window. (BH, p. 28)

She is curious about the darkness, but not unduly distressed; she notes the confusion and wonders how others keep their senses, but there is no suggestion that she herself is affected by it. The graveyard image hints at the city's association with death, but the churchlike atmosphere, the "quietude," the references to the "silent square" and sheltering cloister wall convey the impression that death is a peaceful refuge from the turbulent streets. Esther's tone, throughout this description, indicates a certain emotional distance from the scenes she describes.

In her second journey, however, she does not merely observe "a distracting state of confusion," she experiences it personally:

> I was thrown into such a tumult of alarm, and hurry and distress, that, in spite of every effort I could make to subdue my agitation, I did not seem, to myself, fully to recover my right mind until hours had passed. (BH, p. 768)

Filled with terror, directly experiencing the full impact of participation in a fallen world, she is rushed through a dark "labyrinth" of filthy streets down to the banks of the Thames where her description of the river suggests how much the comforting illusion of death as peaceful refuge has been shaken. The peaceful graveyard as the symbol of death is replaced by a horrifying perception of the river as a "profound black pit of water . . . heavy with indistinct and awful shapes, both of substance and shadow . . . deathlike and mysterious" (BH, p. 771).

As one compares Esther's account of her London experiences in the opening chapters of her narrative with this second account, it is obvious that her detached attitude has been replaced by a terrified sense of direct involvement. Initially, it seemed to Esther that in leaving London she entered an apparently completely different world. In the course of the first journey into the countryside, sunshine, green fields, and the light and warmth of Bleak House replace the darkness and cold of the city (BH, pp. 60-62), but as Esther retraces her steps in quest of her mother, the world beyond London clearly exhibits the same characteristics which had at first seemed to belong only to the city. The green landscape which she had formerly encountered is now all "white with snow " (BH, p. 772), glimmering palely under a winter sky; Bleak House itself, once a beacon standing with its doors wide open to welcome the travellers, now extends no particular welcome (BH, p. 774). When Esther first came to Bleak House, it represented her journey's end, a retreat filled with love and flowers (BH, p. 66). This time, however, Bleak House is only a temporary halt in a bitter winter journey. The household is "amazed" to see her, and can offer no assistance.

The brief visit to Bleak House suggests how futile it is to expect to find innocent refuges in the midst of a fallen world. Esther's next stop, at the miserable hovel of the brickworkers, suggests a breaking down of the artificial distinctions between fallen and "unfallen" man in the world of the novel. Esther has been accustomed to visit here in the past in order to perform certain errands of mercy. The brickworker's recognition of her goodness is indicated by the difference between their response to her, and their rudeness to the meddlesome Mrs. Pardiggle (BH, p. 110). This time, however, Esther has to appear in their midst not as one who comes to offer help, but as one who must ask it, and they are as sullen and churlish with her as they are with each other (BH, p. 779).

The most significant aspect of this phase of her journey, however, is the marked similarity between her descriptions of the countryside as she passes through it and the descriptions of a fog-bound London in the first chapter of the novel:

> The air was so thick with the darkness of the day, and the density of the fall, that we could see but a very little way in any direction. Although it was extremely cold, the snow was but partially frozen and it churned--with a sound as if it were a beach of small shells--under the hooves of the horses into mire and water. They sometimes slipped and foundered for a mile together, and we were obliged to come to a standstill to rest them. One horse fell three times in this first stage, and trembled so, and was so shaken, that the driver had to dismount from his saddle and lead him at last. (BH, p. 780)
>
> The sleet fell all that day unceasingly, a thick mist came on early, and it never rose or lightened for a moment. Such roads I had never seen. I sometimes feared we had missed the way and got into the ploughed grounds, or the marshes. (BH, p. 781)

The similarities between those two passages from Esther's account of her journey, and the following quotation from the first two paragraphs of the novel are obvious:

> Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth . . . Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes--gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better . . . Foot-passengers . . . losing their foothold at street-corners . . . slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke) . . . .
>
> Fog everywhere . . . . (BH, p. 1)

Both descriptions stress mud and mist, cold and darkness. Both are characterized by imagery which suggests a general downward movement (snow, sleet and foundering horses in the one; smoke, soot and people in the other). Both narratives point to an unusual daytime darkness; both depict a world in which one can neither see one's way, nor keep one's footing. But in Esther's narrative, the "implacable November weather" has deepened into actual winter, and hers are not the detached observations of an omniscient eye surveying the scene beneath it, but the words of one who is caught up in the midst of that world.

Esther's journey, then, is thematically significant because it requires her to descend into the frozen, wintry world whose reality she has striven to deny. At its heart lies the filthy burial ground and the corpse of her mother:

> At last we stook under a dark and miserable covered way, where one lamp was burning over an iron gate, and where the morning faintly struggled in. The gate was closed. Beyond it, was a burial ground--a dreadful spot where the night was very slowly stirring; but where I could dimly see heaps of dishonoured graves and stones, hemmed in by filthy houses, with a few dull lights in their windows, and on whose walls a thick humidity broke out like a disease. On the step at the gate, drenched in the fearful wet of such a place, which oozed and splashed down everywhere, I saw, with a cry of pity and horror, a woman lying--. (BH, p. 811)

This is in essence the world which Bucket has made Esther enter; cold dark, wet, filthy, a world of death and corruption.

Esther's gradual release from "that terror of myself" is suggested by the thaw which takes place during the latter part of her journey. The literal thaw is accompanied by specific events which break down Esther's sense of isolation and reveal to her that she is not set apart. Her account of the initial stages of her journey suggests that she is aware of little more than her own terror and the surroundings which heighten it. Her contact with the rest of the world is minimal. While she sits alone in the carriage, Bucket makes all the arrangements, conducts all the interviews, asks all the questions. In the same paragraph, however, in which she alludes to the thaw for the first time, Esther also describes her encounter with a motherly landlady and her three daughters:

> . . . as we drove in under a large gateway . . . a landlady and her pretty daughters came to the carriage-door, entreating me to alight and refresh myself while the horses were making ready. (BH, p. 782)

As Esther looks from their bright faces out to the dreary landscape surrounding this "solitary" inn, and thinks of the painful contrast between "this motherly face brightly set off by daughters" and her own mother, "lying down in such a wood to die" (BH, p. 782), her distress is such that she faints. When she regains consciousness, she is, she tells us "frightened" to find herself in their midst (BH, p. 782). Although her grief is caused in part by her perception of her mother's plight, it is also, I would suggest, occasioned at least in part by her memory of Miss Barbary's condemnation of her as a being set apart. Having been thoroughly exposed to the bleak reality of the fallen world, Esther assumes that Miss Barbary was right; that she is forever set apart, condemned to perpetual isolation, or at least exclusion from full participation in the human community. This is why she is "frightened" to find herself suddenly surrounded by kind and loving faces. She has been accustomed to see herself as an unworthy person who must repay every act of kindness done her by constant self-sacrifice. In this incident she is shown that she is not rejected by the human community; she is returned to her carriage "warmed, refreshed, and comforted by kindness" (BH, p. 783). The point is reinforced by the actions of the landlady's daughter:

> After I had got in, and had taken a grateful leave of them all, the youngest daughter--a blooming girl of nineteen who was to be the first married, they had told me--got upon the carriage step, reached in and kissed me. I have never seen her from that hour, but I think of her to this hour as my friend. (BH, p. 783)

The kiss, which Esther has done nothing to deserve, can never repay ("I have never seen her from that hour"), and which comes from a girl about her own age "who was to be the first married" signifies an incorporation within the human community.

Throughout the rest of her journey, Esther continues to be supported by the compassionate actions of others. They help her, not because she has earned, or will be expected to earn, that assistance by further acts of self-abnegation, but simply in response to her need. In Chancery Lane, near the end of her journey, she is astonished to encounter Allan Woodcourt:

> I could not keep back the tears from my eyes. It was like hearing his voice in a strange country. (BH, p. 802)

The "strange country"--like the "hidden countries" which Pickwick explores--is the fallen world, and Esther's tears represent another manifestation of the thawing of that frozen world through the regenerative power of human love.

Allan not only accompanies Esther the rest of the way, he also shelters her from the cold by wrapping her in his cloak. The gesture is symbolic. When Bucket first came to summon Esther, he warned her of the cold she would encounter:

> "Are you well wrapped up, Miss Summerson? . . . It's a desperate sharp night for a young lady to be out in." (BH, p. 769)

Esther assures him that he need not worry: "I told him I cared for no weather, and was warmly clothed" (BH, p. 769). Her response is characteristic. The clothing she insists will be sufficient to shield her from the freezing atmosphere of the world she is about to enter is like the protective layers of assumed identities she has tried to interpose between the world and its perception of her guilty self. Both are inadequate. The identities break down: Esther is soaked and stained by "the fearful wet." Throughout this episode, her best defence against the cold comes through accepting the help she is offered by others: the kindness of the landlady, the cab-driver's gift of clean straw which he places about her feet (BH, p. 801), and Allan's gift of his cloak. Nor is this all; during the last part of the walk to the graveyard she is literally supported, not only by Allan, but by the arm of that humblest of drudges, Guster, the epileptic kitchen maid (BH, p. 811).

It has been suggested that Esther's whole life revolves around the search for a mother,[46] but I think it is truer to say that it involves a search for the self she has so assiduously denied, the self "frozen" by Barbary's terrible condemnation and buried in the past like the doll, the guilty self Esther has tried to atone for in her role as Dame Durden. I have already argued that Lady Dedlock functions at least in part as a figure on whom Esther can project that guilt. In these final episodes involving Lady Dedlock there are sufficient parallels indicated between mother and daughter to suggest that what Esther confronts in the graveyard is as much herself as her mother. In her last hours, according to Guster, Lady Dedlock's eyes look "almost as if she was blind" (BH, p. 810), a reminder of Esther's earlier condition. Mother and daughter--Esther, by her own account, and Lady Dedlock as she describes herself in her letter--are in a similar emotional state. In her letter Lady Dedlock speaks of how "all that had sustained" her "[gave] way at once," and of her fear that she will "die of terror and [her] conscience" (BH, p. 808). Esther's terror, which makes her experience her surroundings as in "the horror of a dream" (BH, p. 770), accompanies her throughout the whole journey; but perhaps of even more significance is the suggestion that she too experiences a sensation of "all that had sustained" her "giving way at once" when, as she picks her way through streets clogged with blackened heaps of ice and snow, she feels "that great water-gates seemed to be opening and closing in my head, or in the air; and that the unreal things were more substantial than the real" (BH, p. 811). Like her mother, Esther too is "drenched in the fearful wet" of the world she has passed through:

> We stopped in a high-street, where there was a coach-stand. My companion paid our two drivers, who were as completely covered with splashes as if they had been dragged along the roads like the carriage itself; and giving them some brief direction where to take it, lifted me out of it, and into a hackney coach he had chosen from the rest.
>
> "Why, my dear!" he said, as he did this. "How wet you are!"
>
> I had not been conscious of it. But the melted snow had found its way into the carriage; and I had got out two or three times when a fallen horse was plunging, and had to be got up; and the wet had penetrated my dress. (BH, p. 801)

Finally, there is a strong suggestion of a re-enactment of an earlier scene in Esther's account of her moment of recognition:

> I lifted the heavy head, put the long dank hair aside, and turned the face. And it was my mother, cold and dead. (BH, p. 812)

One recalls a similar drawing aside of a veil of hair as Esther confronts her own scarred face in the looking glass:

> My hair had not been cut off . . . It was long and thick. I let it down, and shook it out, and went up to the glass upon the dressing table. There was a little muslin curtain drawn across it. I drew it back: and stood for a moment looking through such a veil of my own hair, that I could see nothing else. Then I put my hair aside, and looked at the reflection in the mirror. (BH, p. 504)

It is possible to interpret the fact that Lady Dedlock is dead when this recognition takes place as evidence of the tragic futility of human endeavour in an inherently evil world. As Hillis Miller points out, Bucket, who seems almost god-like in his ability to cope with this world, nevertheless ultimately must be said to have failed in his quest:

> However rapid his intuitions and deductions, however omniscient his clairvoyance, he is always a moment or two behind the event

> itself. He is not able to prevent Lady Dedlock from reaching the entrance to the pauper graveyard and dying there. He brings Esther to her mother at the very moment that she has just died. However superhuman his prodigies of deduction, he can only reconstruct the past, even though it may be a past that has just happened.[47]

But if Lady Dedlock represents that aspect of the self that Esther has tried to reject, there is a symbolic appropriateness to the death. Esther's fear of that self is largely attributable to Miss Barbary's conviction that it sets Esther apart, that it excludes her from the human community. Esther's craving for love and acceptance is so great that she tries to earn it by repudiating that self and establishing an "acceptable" identity; but what the journey shows her is that she is acceptable as she is. That guilty self "dies" as Esther stoops down to lift it up in that it ceases to exist as something apart from her. Esther can now accept it as part of herself.

There is then, as I have tried to show, considerable evidence to support the view that Esther's journey is intended to confront her with the reality of the fallen world, and to help her to forgive herself for being part of that world by teaching her that she is part of a human community that loves and accepts her as she is. Many critics, however, have found the conclusion of the novel a problem. Laurence Frank, for example, who interprets the journey as a symbolic baptism,[48] does not feel that Dickens has succeeded in showing that it had any effect. Esther, he implies, ought to be seen to have become stronger and more mature as a result of her experience[49] if we are to believe that anything of significance has happened to her. Alex Zwerdling objects to the happy ending:

> Dickens characteristically resorts to fantasy whenever his sharp eye for human suffering has uncovered more than he can bear to

contemplate.[50]

Esther, he thinks, ought to have turned out to be more like Miss Wade in Little Dorrit: "a child brought up in a totally loveless home . . . is almost surely doomed to grow up unable to love anyone."[51] Others feel that the ending represents a sentimental attempt to deny the pessimistic vision of the third person narrator by setting Allan and Esther up in a regenerated Bleak House, which leaves, however, the decaying, corrupt world the novel began with essentially untouched.

Although I do not believe that the ending is as disastrous as some have thought, one must admit that there is something to be said for the points of view of those who have rejected it. While there is some indication of a stronger, more mature Esther in that last interview with Harold Skimpole where, no longer under any illusions about his "innocence," she "gave him to understand . . . that his conduct seemed to involve a disregard of several moral obligations," (BH, p. 829), it is true that her final happiness comes about through no act of her own. The experience of the journey is followed by a renewed determination on Esther's part to go through with the marriage to Mr. Jarndyce, although she has learned by this time that Allan does love her, that her "scarred face was all unchanged to him" (BH, p. 832). And in fact, it is the "triumph of having heard those words" (BH, p. 835) that gives her the courage to ask Mr. Jarndyce when he would like Bleak House to receive its mistress.

Jarndyce, in what at first appears to be a supremely sadistic act, asks Esther to accompany him on an inspection of the house he has purchased for Allan. Esther's distress, as well as her attempts to conceal it, is obvious:

> Because he was so dear, so good, so admirable, I tried to tell him what I thought of him, but I could not articulate a word.
>
> "Tut, tut!" said my guardian. "You make too much of it, little woman. Why how you sob, Dame Durden, how you sob!"
>
> "It is with exquisite pleasure, Guardian--with a heart full of thanks."
>
> . . . When I went to bed, I cried. I am bound to confess that I cried, but I hope it was with pleasure, though I am not quite sure it was with pleasure. (BH, p. 855)

He and Esther go down to see the house, Jarndyce proudly pointing out its beauties, Esther thinking sadly of Allan. Then, suddenly, in a scene straight out of a Victorian melodrama, Jarndyce calls in Allan who has been waiting in the wings and joins the hands of the young lovers:

> We were no longer alone. My husband--I have called him by that name full seven happy years now--stood at my side.
>
> "Allan," said my guardian, "take from me a willing gift, the best wife that ever man had. What more can I say for you than that I know you deserve her! Take with her the little home she brings you. You know what she will make it, Allan; you know what she has made its namesake. Let me share in its felicity sometimes, and what do I sacrifice? Nothing, nothing."
>
> He kissed me once again; and now the tears were in his eyes, as he said more softly:
>
> "Esther, my dearest, after so many years, there is a kind of parting in this too. I know that my mistake has caused you some distress. Forgive your old guardian, in restoring him to his old place in your affections; and blot it out of your memory. Allan, take my dear."
>
> He moved away from under the green roof of leaves, and stopping in the sunlight outside, and turning cheerfully towards us, said,
>
> "I shall be found about here somewhere. It's a west wind, little woman, due west!" (BH, p. 859)

Modern distaste for the staginess of the presentation should not, however, keep us from noticing that a number of significant points are made in this scene. For one thing, while Jarndyce might seem to Esther to have a brightness on him "like the brightness of the Angels" (BH, p. 857), in this scene he confesses to his own human weakness--"I know I have caused you some distress"--and asks for forgiveness. In so doing he closes the moral gap which Esther thinks exists between them. In addition, in surrendering his hopes of marriage with her, he is, like those whom Esther encountered on her journey, teaching her that she may receive as well as give. In Esther's acceptance of his gift, she shows that she has at last assimilated the lessons of her journey. She has now accepted herself sufficiently to be able to accept the willing sacrifices of others, instead of feeling that she must always be the one who relinquishes happiness. As Hillis Miller points out, "final happiness for Esther can come [neither] through her own efforts alone,"[52] nor through Jarndyce's actions. Allan too gives up something for her in his "voluntary surrender of all social determination of his choice of a wife."[53] As the journey reveals, Esther's fulfillment depends upon her ability to see herself as part of a human community which is no less, no more, flawed than she is herself. Like Arthur Clennam in Little Dorrit, she has to learn to accept herself as fallen, and to put aside her yearning for an unattainable innocence.

This does not mean, however, that Dickens has relinquished all hope of the possibility of innocence. Instead, as we shall see in Little Dorrit, he rescues it from the charges of inadequacy and moral irrelevance to which his earlier definitions of it were vulnerable, by re-defining it, and by presenting it as a redemptive influence, rather than something primarily concerned with its own preservation.

In Bleak House, however, his detailed characterization of the world as fallen, along with the multiplicity of devil figures who act as agents for the even larger, more pervasive demonic power of Chancery, leads one to enquire whether or not, in this novel, Dickens has slipped into despair. One notes that the end of Bleak House leaves the world of the opening chapters substantially unchanged. Chesney Wold continues its descent into final darkness:

> Thus Chesney Wold. With so much of itself abandoned to darkness and vacancy; with so little change under the summer shining or the wintry lowering; so sombre and motionless always--no flag flying now by day, no rows of light sparkling by night, with no family to come and go, no visitors to be the souls of pale cold shapes of rooms, no stir of life about it;--passion or pride, even to the stranger's eye, have died away from the place in Lincolnshire, and yielded it to a dull repose. (_BH_, p. 876)

Chancery and Vholes devour their victim; Richard dies, and our last glimpse of Conversation Kenge reveals him "gently moving his right hand as if it were a silver trowel, with which to spread the cement of his words on the structure of the system, and consolidate it for a thousand ages" (_BH_, p. 844).

There is perhaps some suggestion of a possibility for society's regeneration in Dickens's picture of the iron-master and his foundry. It is into his hands that the power held by men like Sir Leicester is passing; and his factory, with its "coalpits and ashes, high chimneys and red bricks, blighted verdure, scorching fires and . . . heavy never-lightening cloud of smoke" (_BH_, p 845), while obviously suggestive of destruction, may also perhaps represent the furnace in which a new order may be forged, the place where iron is "purposely broken to be tested" (_BH_, p. 847). But whatever hope may be implied by Rouncewell is fairly ambiguous. While there are critics who see him as representing "the future taken over by people who are fit to be useful members of a new society,"[54] a significant number of critics including Trevor Blount[55] and Mrs. Leavis[56] detect a certain element of social satire in the portrait.

The main point, I would argue, is that the romantic vision of a general social restoration has been abandoned for the more limited achievement of reconciliation on the individual level. Alex Zwerdling thinks that the concluding chapter of the novel is set "in Eden, where a small group of good and permanently innocent people transform the new Bleak House into a community of love existing outside the blighted world described in the rest of the novel,"[57] but I disagree. The pattern of reconciliation and reintegration revealed in the new Bleak House is not achieved by a group of "permanently innocent people," but by human beings who have recognized their own fallibility and accepted that fact sufficiently to be able to receive as well as to give. In many cases, this also involves accepting a humbler status or a lesser role than the character had originally designed for himself. Ada's romantic marriage ends with the failure and death of Richard, and she has to return to Bleak House to accept, in the true sense of the word, the charity of Mr. Jarndyce. Allan, who had originally attempted to make his fortune as a physician overseas, has to accept the literal shipwreck of that dream and content himself with the humbler role of medical officer to the poor. Jarndyce relinquishes his hope of marrying Esther, and Esther gives up her pursuit of an impossible innocence. Even George Bagnet has to relinquish his stubborn faith in the power of his own innocence and accept the legal assistance he despises. These do not seem to me to be "permanently innocent" people living in some sort of idyllic never-never land, but individuals who have accepted both their own and the limitations of the world they live in.

The counterforce to the atomistic world of the opening chapters, which Hillis Miller characterizes as one where "nothing is related to anything else,"[58] is not to be found in ambitious schemes for social reform, but in the acceptance of limit and in the formation of human bonds on an individual level. For example, nothing can save Chesney Wold in so far as it represents aristocratic institutions. Sir Leicester himself, however, is another story. As representative of nothing but himself, simply as a human being, he is supported and protected, not only by George Rouncewell who becomes his personal attendant, but by Mr. Boythorn as well. Formerly Sir Leicester's most spirited adversary, Mr. Boythorn pretends to quarrel with him still out of tenderness for the old man's pride:

> It is whispered that when he [Boythorn] is most ferocious towards his old foe, he is really most considerate; and that Sir Leicester, in the dignity of being implacable, little supposes how much he is humoured. (BH, p. 873)

Sir Leicester is unaware of the extent to which he is supported by the compassionate concern of others, but the lesson learned by many of the other characters involves their recognition of their dependence on each other. The last scenes of the novel are full of reconciliations and reunions brought about as one character after another permits himself to receive benefits at the hands of someone else. George Rouncewell and his mother have been kept apart by his shame over his failure to realize his ambitions. Mrs. Bagnet's intervention reunites mother and son and enables George to accept his mother's love. Allan accepts Jarndyce's gift of both wife and home, and Esther accepts Jarndyce's surrender of his own hopes concerning her. Jarndyce loses Esther in one sense, but regains her in another:

> He is my husband's best and dearest friend, he is our children's darling, he is the object of our deepest love and veneration . . . I

> have never lost my old names, nor has he lost his; nor do I ever, when he is with us, sit in any other than in my old chair at his side. Dame Trot, Dame Durden, Little Woman!--all just the same as ever; and I answer, Yes dear Guardian! just the same. (BH, p. 879)

Ada, whom Esther earlier had thought was lost to her forever (BH, p. 699), is given into Esther's arms after Richard's death, and Ada herself is "bless[ed] and restor[ed]" (BH, p. 877) by the birth of her son, a second Richard. The old Bleak House receives a new little housekeeper in the person of Ada, and most important of all, the new Bleak House over which Esther and Allan preside becomes a centre of healing which neither denies the world's pain nor attempts to deal with it from a distance. Allan works with the sick and the dying in the community (the healer's role in this society, as Mrs. Leavis suggests, is one of great significance),[59] and Esther comments:

> I never walk out with my husband but I hear the people bless him. . . . I never lie down at night but I know that in the course of the day he has alleviated pain, and soothed some fellow creature in time of need. . . . Is this not to be rich? (BH, p. 879)

Finally, she tells us, even her lost beauty is restored (BH, p. 880).

The ending of Bleak House, however, in spite of the arguments that can be made in its defence, is undeniably ambiguous. Although Esther and Allan do appear to win a kind of redemption in their second Bleak House, its affinities with the pastoral paradises of the earlier novels suggest that the problem of evil in Bleak House is ultimately resolved by retreat. In Bleak House Dickens has presented us with a powerful picture of a fallen world. In Little Dorrit he will explore in much more detail the question of how one ought to respond to that reality.

CHAPTER IV

LITTLE DORRIT: DEBTORS AND REDEMPTION

Bleak House, as I have tried to show, can be defended to some extent against the charges of artificiality and sentimentality sometimes levelled against its conclusion, but in justice to its critics one would, I think, have to admit that the final impression left by the novel is one of an undeniably evil world. Those critics who object vehemently to the happy ending are doing so, I would suggest, as much in response to the novel's otherwise generally pessimistic tone as in reaction to whatever problems the actual ending may present. This is not to deny the real goodness and humour of such characters as the Bagnets, the Rouncewells and Mr. Snagsby, but one must also point out that the efforts of these characters, however good-hearted, to do something about the evil which surrounds them seem pathetically inadequate to the task--so much so, in fact, that one critic has asserted that "in [no other novel] is the movement toward the radical separation of individual salvation and social destiny so dramatic as it is in Bleak House."[1]

Dickens's next novel, Little Dorrit, which I shall discuss briefly in outline before going into detail, displays no softening of the harshness of vision which informs Bleak House. If anything, Dickens's outlook in this novel is even darker.[2] The action of Bleak House is confined to England; Little Dorrit ranges all over Europe--Marseilles, London, Calais, Venice, Rome--and in all of these places, including Switzerland, the one rural setting, one finds the same relentless reiteration of the image of the prison,[3] the wilderness, "the labyrinth[4] trodden by the sons of Adam" (LD, p. 522), imagery which is summed up in each of the two great symbolic descriptions of hell[5] which open each of the two books into which the novel is divided, and which serve to identify the nature of that world as demonic.

But where the major thrust of Bleak House has to do with a bitter exposure of that world's nature, Little Dorrit goes beyond that to accept its reality and to say, in effect, granted that the world *is* fallen,[6] granted that there is no escape from it, where does one go from here? Or, to rephrase the question slightly, how does one and how ought one to cope with existence in a corrupt society? The characters in the novel present a variety of answers to that question, and the methods employed by most of them as they attempt to create some sort of life for themselves might best be described as "how not to do it." The more ruthless among them try to exploit the situation to their own advantage; others protest indignantly that they have been ill-used and struggle to achieve revenge, while the weaker sort simply try to deny their plight by retreating into dreams and illusions.

The position of Arthur Clennam, the hero of the novel, differs from that of most of the others in that he is under no illusions about the nature of the world in which he lives. That he is a sinner, and the world a place of punishment, has been drilled into him since infancy. His sense of guilt is too strong to permit him to make futile protests of innocence, and his sense of decency too great to allow him to exploit his fellow prisoners. He has been brought up on a debit-credit kind of religion which has taught him that sin can only be atoned for by strict "restitution and reparation." His notion of restitution and reparation is not exactly the same as his mother's perverse understanding of the idea; she believes that one atones for having made others suffer by suffering oneself--that being righteous is the same as being miserable. Clennam's view is more practical (in the Meagles's sense of the word); he tries to repair the evil by undoing its effects. In part, his difficulty arises because, at least to begin with, his sense of guilt is vague and unfocused; he longs to pay for his or his family's sins, but does not know what they are and lapses into despair. In addition, in his obsession with "restitution and reparation" he is really trying to earn a kind of salvation through his own efforts.

Clennam is saved by Little Dorrit. Like Oliver Twist and Little Nell, she represents innocence, but unlike theirs, hers is an innocence which involves neither helplessness, nor ignorance of evil. She shows, paradoxically, that the only way to escape the bondage of the Fall is to begin with a clear-sighted recognition of its reality. In a novel in which the major image for the human condition is the debtor's prison, she embodies the New Testament ethic of love and forgiveness ("Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"), against the stern Old Testament ethic of wrath and vengeance represented by Mrs. Clennam.

The opening of the novel places it unmistakeably in hell:

> Marseilles lay burning in the sun . . . . A blazing sun upon a fierce August day . . . . Everything in Marseilles . . . had stared at the fervid sky, and been stared at in return . . . . Strangers were stared out of countenance by the staring white houses, staring white walls, staring white streets, staring

> tracts of arid road, staring hills from which verdure was burnt away.
>
> . . . .
>
> There was no wind to make a ripple on the foul water in the harbour, or on the beautiful sea without. The line of demarcation between the two colours, black and blue, showed the point which the pure sea would not pass; but it lay as quiet as the abominable pool, with which it never mixed. . . . Hindoos, Russians, Chinese, Spaniards, Portuguese, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Genoese, Neapolitans, Venetians, Greeks, Turks, descendents from all the builders of Babel, come to trade at Marseilles, sought the shade alike--taking refuge in any hiding place from a sea too intensely blue to be looked at, and a sky of purple, set with one great flaming jewel of fire.
>
> . . . .
>
> Far away the staring roads, deep in dust, stared from the hill-side, stared from the hollow, stared from the interminable plain. Far away the dusty vines overhanging wayside cottages, and the monotonous wayside avenues of parched trees without shade, drooped beneath the stare of earth and sky. So did the horses with drowsy bells, in long files of carts, creeping slowly towards the interior; so did their recumbent drivers, when they were awake, which rarely happened; so did the exhausted labourers in the fields. Everything that lived or grew, was oppressed by the glare; except the lizard, passing swiftly over rough stone walls, and the cicala, chirping his dry hot chirp, like a rattle. The very dust was scorched brown, and something quivered in the atmosphere as if the air itself were panting.
>
> Blinds, shutters, curtains, awnings, were all closed and drawn to keep out the stare. Grant it but a chink or keyhole, and it shot in like a white-hot arrow. The churches were freest from it. To come out of the twilight of pillars and arches--dreamily dotted with winking lamps, dreamily peopled with ugly old shadows piously dozing, spitting and begging--was to plunge into a fiery river, and swim for life to the nearest stip of shade. (_LD_, p. 2)

The impression of hell is created by the blazing heat, and most of all by the "great flaming jewel of fire" that dominates the scene like a huge evil eye in its "universal stare." It sends men scurrying for shelter from its white-hot shafts, and creates a barren landscape of death in which only insects and reptiles, those traditional avatars of evil, flourish. The landscape is the landscape of hell, a sterile world where all the verdure has been burnt away, the parched trees give no shade, and the roads are "deep in dust." It is a world hemmed in on one side by "the abominable pool," on the other, by "an interminable plain." It is the centre of the world, the gathering place of "all the descendents of the builders of Babel," but it is a world which exhausts and enervates all those who traffic in its wares. "Blinds, shutters, curtains, awnings" are all closed or drawn in an effort to shut out the terrible light. "The churches are freest from it," but they offer only a feeble refuge in dreams. "Dreamily dotted with winking lights" against the steady glare outside, they are peopled with "ugly old shadows," engaged, not in prayer, but in "piously dozing, spitting and begging."

The second book opens in a frozen hell:

> . . . the fresh beauty of the lower journey had yielded to barrenness and desolation. A craggy track, up which the mules in single file, scrambled and turned from block to block, as though they were ascending the broken staircase of a gigantic ruin, was their way now. No trees were to be seen, nor any vegetable growth, save a poor brown scrubby moss, freezing in the chinks of rock. Blackened skeleton arms of wood by the wayside pointed upward . . . as if the ghosts of former travellers overwhelmed by the snow haunted the scene of their distress. Icicle-hung caves and cellars built for refuges from the sudden storms, were like so many whispers of the perils of the place; never-resting wreaths and mazes of the mist wandered about, hunted by a moaning wind.
>
> . . . .
>
> There was no speaking among the string of riders. The sharp cold, the fatigue of the journey, and the new sensation of a catching in the breath . . . kept them silent.
>
> . . . .
>
> Up here in the clouds, everything was seen through cloud, and seemed dissolving into cloud. . . . In the midst of this, the great stable of the convent . . . poured forth its contribution of cloud, as if the whole rugged edifice were filled with nothing else, and would collapse as soon as it had emptied itself, leaving the snow to fall upon the bare mountain summit. (LD, pp. 432-33)

This frigid waste is as much a place of "barrenness and desolation" as the blazing city and parched plains of the first chapter. A treeless expanse of crumbling ruins, haunted by the ghosts of former travellers, it too is a gathering place for all the world in the midst of a landscape of death: "blackened skeleton arms of wood," "moaning winds," "mazes of the mist," and "icicle hung caves." (The passage is climaxed by the description of the convent morgue where "dead travellers found upon the mountain side" are "silently assembled," still frozen in the attitudes of life.) Here again, the church appears to offer refuge, but the same air of dream-like unreality is indicated by the great clouds of steam issuing from the stable door which makes it seem as if "the whole rugged edifice were filled with nothing else, and would collapse as soon as it had emptied itself, leaving the snow to fall upon the bare mountain summit."

In between these two major descriptions of hell are many lesser evocations of the same ubiquitous demonic landscape. In the early portions of Bleak House there is at least a hint of an unspoiled world beyond London and Chancery, but in Little Dorrit there are no possibilities of escape from the demonic world anywhere at all. Hell is in London, where the lights on the bridges shine "like demon eyes" (LD, p. 174), and Arthur Clennam looks out of his mother's window onto the unchanging prospect of a "blasted and blackened forest of chimneys" illuminated by an angry "red glare" (LD, p. 38); hell is in Italy, where Mr. Dorrit drives across the "black, dry sea" of the Campagna with only "a pale flare on the horizon, like an exhalation from the ruin sown land" to show that "the city was yet far off" (LD, p. 637); it is in Rome itself, where "everything was crumbling away" (LD, p. 637) and where the first thing Dorrit encounters on entering the city is a grotesque funeral procession with an "indistinct show of dirty vestments, lurid torches, and swinging censers" (LD, p. 638).

How does one live in a world which is clearly hell? Most of the methods adopted by the majority of the characters in the novel are epitomized by Rigaud, the chief devil[7] of Dickens's nineteenth-century Inferno. Rigaud seems to pattern himself after Milton's fallen angels as they seek to cope with a similar problem. Those devils, one will recall, try to make their hellish existence endurable by telling themselves that hell is not a prison appointed for their punishment, but a land of opportunity for those sufficiently ruthless to exploit and dominate it. When that wears thin, they alternate between consoling themselves with "vain philosophy," railing against the terrible injustice of their fate, and swearing to get even, all the while deceiving themselves about who and where they are.

To a greater or lesser extent, all of these responses are exhibited by most of the characters in Little Dorrit, and it is the similarity between their reactions and those of Rigaud which connects them with the devil of the novel. Rigaud is clearly a devil, as the presence of traditional demonic imagery in his portrait indicates. He is usually recognizable, in spite of his penchant for disguise, by the tell-tale red hair which resists all efforts at concealment. He has a "diabolically" silent laugh (LD, 359), the "most evil of smiles" (LD, p. 352) and casts a "monstrous shadow" (LD, p. 445). He is also strongly associated with the traditional reptilian image of the demonic. Amy and Pet shrink from him as from "an odious creature of the reptile kind" (LD, p. 509), while Arthur Clennam shudders at the sight of Rigaud's "cold, white hands, with the fingers lithely twisting about and twining one over another like serpents"

(LD, p 748).

Rigaud's appearance in this novel is interesting because he recalls to some extent the devils of the very early novels--single, major devil-figures like Quilp and Fagin, who function as the personification of the evil which menaces the innocent hero from without. Devils of this sort tend to disappear from the novels of the middle period. In Martin Chuzzlewit, as we have already seen, Dickens clearly subordinates the suggestion of the demonic in his portrait of Jonas Chuzzlewit to emphasis on Jonas' identity as a very human murderer, while in Dombey and Son, the suggestion of Mr. Carker's role as evil enchanter implies the modulation of the demonic onto a more human and less awesome level.

In Bleak House, however, the devils return with a vengeance. Their way had already been prepared to some extent by Steerforth and Heep in that these latter figures function as devils in relation to David in much the same way that the multiple devils of Bleak House function in relation to society as a whole; that is, as aspects of an internal rather than external evil. With Rigaud one returns to the single devil figure,[8] but with a significant difference. Unlike Fagin and Quilp who are clearly representative of evil as an external principle, Rigaud, however much he may resemble the early devils in other regards, functions in exactly the same fashion as the devils of Bleak House; that is, as symbolic of the evil which originates within a corrupt society. In this regard, he heralds the re-emergence of devil figures as characters of some importance in the later novels: Monseigneur in A Tale of Two Cities, Orlick in Great Expectations, and John Jasper in The Mystery of Edwin Drood.

Not only does Dickens restore the devil to a position of central importance in Little Dorrit, in some ways he appears to go even beyond Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop by hinting that, unlike Quilp and Fagin, each of whom is merely a devil, Rigaud is perhaps the devil; if not an incarnation of Satan himself, then at the very least one of the more important Infernal personages: "Mr. Rigaud, Mr. Blandois, Mr. Beelzebub" (LD, p. 774). When the news of his acquittal by a French court is announced, the audience is aghast to hear that "the devil was actually let loose at Marseilles" (LD, p. 126), and a clergyman in the crowd feels especially qualified to discuss the matter "as the devil was in question." In both of these instances, the use of the definite article is significant.

But perhaps a better indication that Rigaud is meant to be seen as something more clearly Satanic than most of Dickens's earlier devils is the extent to which his characterization seems to reflect the influence of both Defoe's History of the Devil, and Milton's portrait of Satan in Paradise Lost. The subject of both these works, of course, is primarily the devil. "The prince of darkness," says Lear, "is a gentleman,"[9] and Rigaud constantly insists upon his rank: "'You know me for a gentleman'" (LD, p. 8), "'Once a gentleman . . . always a gentleman'" (LD, p. 745). True, he has obviously seen better days, but as Defoe notes of the devil, "what he may be fallen to, is one thing . . . what he is fallen from is another."[10] "The Devil, as mean thoughts as you may have of him, is of a better family than any of you, nay, the best gentleman of you all."[11] Rigaud proudly proclaims:

"A gentleman I am; a gentleman I'll live, and a gentleman I'll

> die! It's my intent to be a gentleman. It's my game. Death of my soul [the oath is significant], I'll play it out wherever I go!" (LD, p. 9)

As the corrupt society of Little Dorrit defines gentleman, Rigaud has as good a claim to the title as anyone. Gentility, according to the polite world of the novel, means never having to do any useful work. Rigaud refuses, even in prison, to soil his soft, white "gentleman's" hands and argues that the fact that neither his jailer nor his cell-mate have "'ever thought of looking to [him] to do any kind of work'" is proof enough that "'from the first moment [they] saw [him] here'" they knew he "'was a gentleman'" (LD, p. 8).

Rigaud is also justified in his claim that he is "treated and respected as a gentleman universally" (LD, p. 9). Henry Gowan, who prides himself on his aristocratic Barnacle connection, does not scruple to cultivate his acquaintance; Miss Wade receives him, so do Mrs. Clennam and Mr. Dorrit. Even his jailer, who ought to know better, refers to him as "the master" (LD, p. 5).

Defoe argues that the devil is really a creature of air, but that he can, when he wishes, "reside in such people as he finds for his purpose."[12] The Swiss landlady's denunciation of Rigaud, sometimes cited as proof of the older Dickens's growing reactionary tendencies,[13] is perhaps designed to suggest Rigaud's identity as an incarnation of Satan:

> "I tell you this, my friend, that there are people . . . who have no good in them--none. That there are people whom it is necessary to detest without compromise. That there are people who must be dealt with as enemies of the human race. That there are people who have no human heart, and who must be crushed like savage beasts, and cleared out of the way. . . . And I do not doubt that this man--whatever they call him, I forget his name--is one of them." (LD, p. 127)

The passionate intensity of her harangue ("People whom it is _necessary_ to detest without compromise," "who _must_ be dealt with as enemies of the human race," "who have _no_ human heart," "who _must_ be crushed like savage beasts" [my italics]) suggests that she is speaking of the devil, not a man.

The influence of Milton's Satan on Dickens's characterization of Rigaud can be seen in Rigaud's fondness for romantic self-glorification. His crimes are mean and squalid: he shoves his wife off the edge of a cliff, he poisons Gowan's dog, and he tries to blackmail Mrs. Clennam; but he always talks about himself in language which suggests the romantic Byronic hero, much as Satan loves to dress up his wickedness with a false veneer of nobility and heroism. In Rigaud's mouth, demonic arrogance becomes a natural and noble independence: "'I am proud. It is also my character to govern. I can't submit. I must govern'" (_LD_, p. 10). (The plethora of _I_'s, by the way, is a consistent characteristic of Rigaud's speech.) The lover of disguise claims that "'frankness is a part of my character'" (_LD_, p. 11), and the brutal wife-killer insists not only that he is "'sensitive and brave'" (_LD_, p. 11), but that "'chivalry towards the sex is part of my character'" (_LD_, p. 351). With the "great cloak and . . . furtive slouch hat" (_LD_, p. 492) which he usually affects, he even dresses the part of the romantic hero-villain.

Even more clearly Satanic is his carefully nurtured sense of grievance against mankind in general, and his burning desire to get even. Like Satan, he cultivates the "study of revenge:"[14]

> "I am a man . . . whom society has deeply wronged . . . I have been shrieked at through the streets. I have been guarded through the streets against men, and especially women, running

> at me armed with any weapons they could lay their hands on. I have lain in prison for security, with the place of my confinement kept a secret, lest I should be torn out of it and felled by a hundred blows.
>
> . . . .
>
> Such are the humiliations that society has inflicted upon me . . . But society shall pay for it.
>
> . . . .
>
> The wrongs society has heaped upon me are treasured in this breast." (LD, pp. 132-33)

In another scene, strongly reminiscent of Satan's hovering over the peaceful earth, filled with thoughts of "mischievous revenge,"[15] Rigaud eyes the town that lies before him, and curses it:

> "I, hungry, thirsty, weary. You, imbeciles, where the lights are yonder, eating and drinking, and warming yourselves at fires! I wish I had the sacking of your town; I would repay you, my children." (LD, p. 124)

One's impression that in Rigaud one is dealing with someone or something of more than ordinary demonic power tends to increase as the novel unfolds. Rigaud teases his audience by dropping sly hints about his real identity. He asks Flintwich if he has seen any devils, and when Flintwich grimly responds, "'not any that introduce themselves under that name and in that capacity'" (LD, p. 359), Rigaud laughs sardonically. When he is accused of selling his friends, he replies boldly:

> "I sell anything that commands a price.
>
> . . . .
>
> Society sells itself and sells me: and I sell Society." (LD, p. 749)

Towards the end of the novel, he begins to speak of himself in the third person, and his claims become even more grandiose:

> "He'll flourish here, and everywhere . . . He always has; he always will!" (LD, p. 750)

His statement suggests that his hearers are dealing with a being of eternal power (always has; always will), and the use of the third person hints perhaps at the kind of Satanic possession that Defoe discusses in his History of the Devil.

Rigaud then, if not Satan himself, is clearly a devil-figure of major proportions. I do not however believe that his presence within the world of Little Dorrit means that Dickens has returned to the more simple moral universe of the earlier novels. To begin with, unlike Fagin and Quilp, Gashford or Chester, who are all major movers of events in the novels in which they appear, Rigaud is of only minor significance in the development of the plot of Little Dorrit. Fagin tries to corrupt Oliver in order to deprive him of his rightful inheritance; Quilp is directly responsible for Nell's flight, and indirectly, for her death; Gashford foments the riots which lead to Barnaby's being nearly hanged, and Chester is responsible for the sacking of the Maypole. Rigaud does nothing of comparable significance. He has nothing to do with the Dorrits' imprisonment, nor with their eventual release; nothing to do with Mr. Merdle and the speculation fever which ruins so many; nothing (except after the fact) to do with Clennam's mysterious past, nor Mrs. Clennam's decision to conceal it. Most of his evil deeds, with the exception of the murder of his wife, which has no bearing on the plot, amount to little more than unpleasant mischief.

Rigaud's real importance lies not so much in what he does (which is not really much), as in what he represents (which is a great deal). He fulfills a role in relation to the corrupt society of Little Dorrit very similar to Steerforth's role in relation to David Copperfield.[16] Just as Steerforth can be interpreted as a symbolic projection of certain aspects of David's character, so Rigaud serves as a powerful image of the characteristic values and attitudes of a whole society. Rigaud reflects, as though he were a mirror which both grotesquely magnifies and distorts at the same time, the viciousness, stupidity and selfishness of a society which tries to hide its rottenness under "surface."

Fallen man, according to the Genesis account, must earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, and the necessity of honest labour is part of Dickens's creed throughout all his later work. Pip has to relinquish his great expectations and go out to earn his own living; Eugene Wrayburn must also give up genteel idleness and learn to assume responsibility for himself. Most of the characters in Little Dorrit, however, from Rigaud on down (or up, as the case may be) attempt to deny their fallen condition by striving after a gentility which will enable them to earn their bread by the sweat of someone else's brow. "'A gentleman,'" says Rigaud, "'must be waited on'" (LD, p. 745); "'I am born to be served'" (LD, p. 746). The more desperate Mr. Dorrit's position as a prisoner becomes, the more he seeks to evade that reality by insisting upon his rank. The more he seeks to assert his position, the more he exploits the goodness and generosity of his younger daughter:

> The more Fatherly he grew as to the Marshalsea, and the more dependent he became on the contributions of his changing family, the greater stand he made by his forlorn gentility. With the same hand that had pocketed a collegian's half-crown half an hour ago, he would wipe away the tears that streamed over his cheeks if any reference were made to his daughters' earning their bread. So, over and above her other daily cares, the Child of the Marshalsea had always upon her, the care of preserving the genteel fiction that they were all idle beggars together. (LD, p. 74)

After the family fortunes have changed for the better, he lectures Little Dorrit on the importance of never doing anything for herself:

> ". . . your not exposing yourself to the remarks of our attendants; by appearing to have at any time dispensed with their services and performed them for yourself is--ha--highly important."
>
> "Why, who can doubt it?" cried Miss Fanny. "It's the essence of everything." (LD, p. 456)

Henry Gowan, who must paint for a living, attempts to preserve his social status by cultivating the pose of the gentleman amateur, and is made "jaundiced and jealous" by the public's refusal to support his dilettante productions:

> . . . people of condition had absolutely taken pains to bring him into fashion. But somehow it had all failed. The prejudiced public had stood out against it obstinately. . . . They had determined to believe that in every service, except their own, a man must qualify himself by striving, early and late, and by working heart and soul, might and main. (LD, p. 206)

The desire to evade the work which is one of the consequences of the fall is largely responsible for the speculation fever which sweeps the country. Merdle's bubble companies appear to hold out the promise of vast sums of unearned wealth, wealth which is based on the robbing and swindling of others: "Every partaker of his [Merdle's] magnificent feasts would be seen to have been a sharer in the plunder of innumerable homes" (LD, p. 710).

The corrupt society of the novel despises work, and like Pip's fellow villagers, honours those who apparently do not have to do any. Even old Mr. Meagles, a genuinely decent man and a direct descendent of the many benevolent elderly gentlemen who appear in the pages of Dickens's novels, is not immune to the taint of this false code.[17] He admires Daniel Doyce, the hard-working inventor, but it is an admiration tinged with an air of patronizing superiority in which Arthur Clennam observes a "microscopic portion of the mustard seed that had sprung up into the great tree of the Circumlocution Office"

(LD, p. 194). A naive admiration for rank destroys the usual warmth and spontaneity of Mr. Meagles's hospitality. When one of the Barnacles comes to dine, "Mr. Meagles seemed to feel that this small spice of Barnacle imparted to his table the flavour of the whole family tree. In its presence, his frank, fine, genuine qualities paled; he was not so easy, he was not so natural, he was striving after something that did not belong to him, he was not himself" (LD, p. 208). An unconscious snobbery even perverts his response to his wife's compassion for the foundlings. When she weeps over their orphaned state, he suggests that they "take one of these same children to be a little maid to Pet" (LD, p. 18). It is as if Mr. Brownlow were to take Oliver home to be his bootboy.

In Little Dorrit Dickens presents a society which mostly occupies itself with trying to deny that all men are sons of Adam and inheritors of his curse. The rejection of work and the glorification of idleness is only one of the ways in which it apes the devil, personified by Rigaud. A second species of denial, also exemplified by him, has to do with the attitude taken towards the pain and suffering which human existence inevitably entails. Every character in the novel, whether he recognizes it or not, is a prisoner in the fallen world and doomed to suffer in consequence. A very few characters, like Cavaletto and Little Dorrit, humbly accept their lot without protest. Cavaletto faces unjust imprisonment with the calm stoicism of the peasant:

> John Baptist . . . lay down upon the bench, with his face turned over on his crossed arms, and slumbered. In his submission, in his lightness, in his good-humour, in his short-lived passion, in his easy contentment with hard bread and hard stones, in his ready sleep, in his fits and starts altogether, a true son of the land that gave him birth. (LD, p. 14)

Little Dorrit's efforts are concerned, not with the injustice of her own plight, but with relieving the misery of others. But Amy and John Baptist are exceptions. Like Rigaud, who rationalizes away his guilt and swears, "'I am a man . . . whom society has deeply wronged . . . But society shall pay for it" (LD, p. 132), most of the characters in the novel are obsessed with a sense of personal injury[18] and a desire to obtain revenge. They see themselves, not as sinners, but as victims. Tattycoram burns with resentment because Pet Meagles is the adored daughter of the house, while she is only the maid:

> "I am ill-used, I am ill-used, I am ill-used!
>
> . . . .
>
> I am younger than she is by two or three years, and yet it's me that looks after her, as if I was old, and it's she that's always petted and called Baby! I detest the name. I hate her!
>
> . . . .
>
> I'll run away. I'll do some mischief. I won't bear it; I can't bear it; I shall die if I try to bear it!" (LD, p. 26)

Only by "doing some mischief," by seeking vengeance, does Tattycoram feel that her life can be made tolerable. Miss Wade, who later becomes her patron, cannot forgive the world for letting her be born illegitimate, and is so filled with hatred as a result that she can see nothing but deliberate insult in every act of kindness directed at her. She shelters a run-away Tattycoram because she sees in her "much of the rising against swollen patronage and selfishness, calling themselves kindness, protection, benevolence, and other fine names, which I have described as inherent in my nature" (LD, p. 671). When the quarantined passengers discuss their reactions to imprisonment, she exclaims:

> "If I had been shut up in any place to pine and suffer, I should always hate that place and wish to burn it down or raze it to the ground." (LD, p. 23)

Both Miss Wade and Tattycoram are so embittered by what they perceive as the injustice of their lots that their responses border on the pathological. Their sense of outrage and injured merit, however, differs only in intensity from the attitude of Fanny Dorrit, for example, who is a much more typical representative of society. Fanny sees life as a battlefield in which one must be constantly on the alert against attack, and quick to repay in kind. Her encounters with Mrs. Merdle are a series of "skirmishes," and "passages of arms" (LD, p. 604). Stung by that lady's patronizing airs, Fanny determines to "make her pay for it" (LD, p. 243), and marries Mrs. Merdle's son in a spirit of revenge:

> "That piece of insolence may think now, that it would be great success to get her son off upon me, and shelve me. But, perhaps she little thinks how I would retort upon her if I married her son. I would oppose her in everything, and compete with her. I would make it the business of my life.
>
> . . . .
>
> One thing I could certainly do, my child: I could make her older. And I would!" LD, pp. 591-92)

Her sister's attitude of patient submission is dismissed as lack of "spirit " and "self-respect" (LD, p. 243). Her own experience of suffering arouses in Fanny nothing but an appetite for revenge and domination. She encourages Edmund Sparkler's attentions in order "to make a slave of him":

> "I shall make him fetch and carry, my dear, and I shall make him subject to me." (LD, p. 498)

Mrs. Clennam is perhaps the most interesting example of all. While Fanny makes no bones about her desire to get even with the world, Mrs. Clennam makes a great show of resigning herself to the fact that the world "is expressly meant to be a scene of gloom, and hardship, and dark trial, for the creatures who are made out of its dust" (LD,

p. 357). She speaks of herself as a sinner, "'justly infirm and righteously afflicted'" (LD, p. 46). "'I endure without murmuring,'" she tells her son, "'because it is appointed I shall so make reparation for my sins'" (LD, p. 50). But she is guilty of a monstrous self-deception. The god she submits herself to is a personification of her own insatiable lust for revenge:

> . . . she still abided by her old impiety--still reversed the order of Creation, and breathed her own breath into a clay image of her Creator. (LD, p. 775)

She sees herself as the divinely appointed instrument called upon to "lay the hand of punishment" (LD, p. 775) upon her enemies. Sins against her are seen as sins "against the Lord" (LD, p. 775), sins for which there can be no forgiveness:

> Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors was a prayer too poor in spirit for her. Smite thou my debtors, Lord, wither them, crush them; do Thou as I would, and Thou shalt have my worship: this was the impious tower of stone she built up to scale Heaven. (LD, p. 47)

In spite of all her impassioned speeches about "the corruption of our hearts, the evil of our ways, the curse that is upon us" (LD, p. 774), she excludes herself from that judgement, and denies the fact of her own guilt, not by protesting her innocence as so many other characters do, but by identifying herself with the Judge, rather than the judged. In so doing, she becomes demonic--"a female Lucifer in appetite for power" (LD, p. 782)--as she tries to win redemption, not by submission and repentence, but like Satan, by storming Heaven, by building "an impious tower of stone . . . to scale Heaven."

Exploiting others by refusing to work, denying one's own guilt while demanding that everybody else be punished--these, according to the novel, are two of the ways in which unrepentent man tries to make his life endurable. A third approach, again suggested by the figure of Rigaud, has to do with the substitution of the false, the theatrical and the illusory for the unpalatable realities of existence. "'We must have humbug,'" says Ferdinand Barnacle, speaking of what Bacon identified as man's "natural though corrupt love of the lie,"[19] "'we all like humbug, we couldn't get along without humbug'" (LD, p. 738). Merdle succeeded, he says, because men like to be swindled:

> "The next man who has as large a capacity and as genuine a taste for swindling, will succeed as well. . . . I think you really have no idea how the human bees will swarm to the beating of any old tin kettle; in that fact lies the complete manual of governing them. When they can be got to believe that the kettle is made of the precious metals, in that fact lies the whole power of men like our late lamented." (LD, p. 738)

Rigaud, of course, as the devil, is the arch-deceiver, a master of illusion whose appearance seems to shift and blur even as one watches. The landlady at the Break of Day, observing him, finds herself thinking at one moment "that this was a handsome man, at another moment, that this was an ill-looking man" (LD, p. 128). His connection with the world of illusion ("He had a certain air of being a handsome man--which he was not; and a certain air of being a well-bred man--which he was not" [LD, p. 10]), is expressed in part by his love of disguises, and his contempt for those who are supposed to be fooled by them, by their relative clumsiness; a new name, a perfunctory attempt to change the colour of his hair, and he is in business.

Most of all, Rigaud is the devil as actor. He is a very melodramatic figure, a creature with "a theatrical air" (LD, p. 9), fond of flourishing the cloak which was de rigueur for any self-respecting Victorian stage-villain, and given to stagey speeches:

> "Blandois, you shall turn the tables on society, my little child. Haha! Holy blue, you have begun well, Blandois." (LD, p. 352)

The world of illusion in Little Dorrit is symbolized to a considerable extent by the theatre.[20] Both Fanny and Frederick Dorrit are professionally involved with the stage, Fanny as a dancer, and Frederick as a musician. When Little Dorrit, who is, significantly, "almost as ignorant of the ways of theatres as of the ways of gold mines" (LD, p. 233), goes to visit her sister there, she encounters a labyrinthine world of darkness, dust, confusion, death and decay:

> . . . they made way for her to enter a dark hall--it was more like a great grim lamp gone out than anything else . . . A man so much in want of airing that he had a blue mould upon him, sat watching this dark place from a hole in the corner, like a spider.
>
> . . . .
>
> At last they came into a maze of dust, where a quantity of people were tumbling over one another, and where there was such a confusion of unaccountable shapes of beams, bulkheads, brick walls, ropes, and rollers, and such a mixture of gaslight and daylight, that they seemed to have got on the wrong side of the pattern of the universe. (LD, p. 234)

This passage implies the strong relationship between illusion, the demonic and the fallen world. The whole scene suggests hell, from the spider-like guardian of "the maze of dust" to the confusion created both by people falling over one another and by the "unaccountable shapes," to the hint of inversion in "the wrong side of the universe." When Frederick Dorrit, of whom "the carpenters had a joke to the effect that he was dead without being aware of it" (LD, p. 236), stumbles up from the orchestra pit at his niece's summons, he looks like a ghost rising from the grave: "'I am coming, I am coming!' [he said] and crept forth by some underground way which emitted a cellarous smell" (LD, p. 236).

Many of the characters in the novel conduct themselves as if they were actors in a play. Fat and middle-aged, Flora Finching insists on behaving as if she and Arthur Clennam were the star-crossed young lovers in a sentimental drama:

> With the sensation of becoming more and more light-headed every minute, Clennam saw the relict of the late Mr. F. enjoying herself in the most wonderful manner by putting herself and him in their old places, and going through all the old performances--now, when the stage was dusty, when the scenery was faded, when the youthful actors were dead, when the orchestra was empty, when the lights were out. (LD, p. 155)

Mrs. Merdle literally raises the curtain on entering the room, and Fanny helps to heighten the impression that we are watching a stage performance by hushing the audience in anticipation:

> Fanny with a warning frown pointed to a curtained doorway . . . The curtain shook next moment, and a lady, raising it with a heavy ringed hand, dropped it behind her again as she entered.
>
> The lady was not young and fresh from the hand of Nature, but was young and fresh from the hand of her maid. (LD, p. 238)

Other characters, who are perhaps slightly less obviously theatrical in outlook, nevertheless spend their lives playing carefully selected roles which have little or nothing to do with the reality of their situation; indeed, for the most part, they generally involve a direct inversion of reality. Mr. Casby gets himself up as "the Last of the Patriarchs," "benefactor to his species . . . father to the orphan and a friend to the friendless" (LD, p. 146), while he squeezes Bleeding Heart Yard dry by proxy. Mr. Dorrit assumes the role of Father of the Marshalsea while he ignores his parental responsibility towards his own children, and later plays feudal landlord to a tenantry of fellow imprisoned debtors. Mr. Merdle, who robs and swindles, spreading the contagion of Mr. Merdle's complaint, is hailed in the streets as if he were the new Messiah,[21] while Mr. Dorrit basks in the reflected glow:

> Then, leaning on Mr. Merdle's arm, did Mr. Dorrit descend the staircase, seeing the worshippers on the steps, and feeling that the light of Mr. Merdle shone by reflection on himself. Then, the carriage, and the ride into the City; and the people who looked at them; and the hats that flew off grey heads; and the general bowing and crouching before this wonderful mortal, the like of which prostration of spirit was not to be seen--no, by high Heaven, no! It may be worth thinking of by all Fawners of all denominations--in Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral put together, on any Sunday of the year. It was a rapturous dream to Mr. Dorrit, to find himself set aloft in this public car of triumph, making a golden progress to that befitting destination, the golden Street of the Lombards. (LD, p. 618)

This is the same Mr. Merdle of whom the narrator later comments: "every servile worshipper of riches who had helped to set him on his pedestal, would have done better to worship the Devil point-blank" (LD, p. 710).

In this kind of world appearance is all that counts. According to Henry Gowan, all one need do is "'to keep up the pretence as to labour, and study, and patience . . . in short, to pass the bottle of smoke, according to rule'" (LD, p. 402). Mr. Dorrit, after his release from prison, devotes himself to keeping up appearances, to maintaining the illusion that he is "a gentleman, unspoiled, unspotted" (LD, p. 479) with no guilty past behind him. This denial of reality makes Little Dorrit see their whole triumphant progress through Europe as false and dream-like:[22]

> Sitting opposite her father in the travelling-carriage, and recalling the old Marshalsea room, her present existence was a dream. All that she saw was new and wonderful, but it was not real; it seemed to her as if these visions of mountains and picturesque countries might melt away at any moment, and the carriage, turning some abrupt corner, bring up with a jolt at the old Marshalsea gate. (LD, p. 463)

The only things that seem real to her in all her travels are the squalor and misery which the picturesque facades conceal:

> Among the day's unrealities would be, roads where the bright red

> vines were looped and garlanded together on trees for many miles; woods of olives; white villages and towns on hillsides, lovely without, but frightful in their dirt and poverty within . . . beggars of all sorts everywhere; pitiful, picturesque, hungry, merry: children beggars and aged beggars. Often at posting houses, and other halting places, these miserable creatures would appear to her the only realities of the day. (LD, p. 465)

For some of the characters in the novel, the cultivation of illusion becomes an instrument with which to reshape reality into a form more to their liking, as Mrs. Gowan does when she persists in her "wonderfully mythical" (LD, p. 522) interpretation of her son's marriage to Pet Meagles. Others simply deny the more unpleasant aspects of the world they live in: "'a truly refined mind will seem to be ignorant of anything that is not perfectly proper, placid and pleasant'" (LD, p. 477). For still others, however, a substitute reality of dreams is all that makes life bearable. Arthur Clennam is drawn to dreaming as a means of escaping the sense of futility and disappointment which oppresses him:

> it had been the uniform tendency of this man's life--so much was wanting in it to think about, so much that might have been better directed and happier to speculate upon--to make him a dreamer after all. (LD, p. 40)

Affery, who lives at the heart of hell in Mrs. Clennam's dark ruin of a house, tormented by the demonic Flintwich, and tyrannized over by her implacable mistress, has not only almost completely lost the capacity to distinguish between dreams and reality (LD, pp. 41-42), she has even lost the desire to awaken: "'Don't ask me nothing . . . I have been in a dream for ever so long. Go away, go away!'" (LD, p. 690).

But if one cannot find relief from the pain of existence either in dreams or in vengeance, how is one to endure a world whose moral and spiritual values are epitomized by a devil? In his portrait of Arthur Clennam Dickens presents both a moving analysis of the plight of everyman, and an optimistic resolution of his predicament.

Clennam and Esther Summerson in Bleak House are both used to typify the same problem; they are both basically good but flawed individuals struggling with the problem of human guilt, and as such, Dickens tends to portray them in very similar terms. Like Esther, Clennam is an illegitimate child raised in ignorance of his birth by an even harsher version of Miss Barbary. He recalls his dreary childhood, "scared out of his senses by a horrible tract which commenced business with the poor child by asking him in its title, why he was going to Perdition" (LD, p. 29). He is reared in a soul-destroying atmosphere which stresses that the world is not only fallen and man a sinful creature in need of redemption, but that there can be no forgiveness without strict restitution and reparation:

> "I am the only child of parents who weighed, measured, and priced everything . . . professors of a stern religion, their very religion was a gloomy sacrifice of tastes and sympathies that were never their own, offered up as a part of a bargain for the security of their possessions. Austere faces, inexorable discipline and penance in this world and terror in the next--nothing graceful or gentle anywhere, and the void in my cowed heart everywhere--this was my childhood." (LD, p. 21)

Clennam and Esther resemble each other, not only in their illegitimacy and persecuted childhoods, but in the fact that both of them were born to parents who genuinely loved one another, however flawed by weakness or unruly passion that love might have been. From these origins, both children derive a mysterious grace which saves them from adopting the loveless code of their guardians. Esther, instead of slipping into the bitterness of a Miss Wade, resolves to win some love for herself by being good; Clennam never loses his faith in the reality of all "the gentle and good things his life had been without" (LD, p. 165):

> And this saved him still from the whimpering weakness and cruel selfishness of holding that because such a happiness or such a virtue had not come into his little path, or worked well for him, therefore it was not in the great scheme, but was reducible, when found in appearance, to the basest elements. A disappointed mind he had, but a mind too firm and healthy for such unwholesome air. Leaving himself in the dark, it could run into the light, seeing it shine on others, and hailing it. (LD, p. 165)

His conviction that goodness and virtue are at least as real as cruelty and pain is sufficient to save him from the vindictiveness of his mother and the cynicism of Henry Gowan, but is is not enough to save him from near despair about his own situation. He describes himself as an exile, "'a waif and stray everywhere'" (LD, p. 20), a man whose spirit has been "'broken, not bent'" (LD, p. 20), for whom "'will, purpose and hope . . . were extinguished before [he] could sound the words'" (LD, p. 20). His spiritual paralysis originates in a vague but oppressive sense of guilt that he struggles to identify throughout the course of the novel. Unlike Esther, who experiences her guilt as something immediate and personal, Clennam tends to displace his by attributing it to something his father has done; but whether perceived as personal or inherited, the consequences are the same. Consciousness of guilt becomes for both Esther and Clennam the single most important factor ruling their lives.

Clennam differs from Esther most significantly in the manner in which he responds to his perception of guilt. Where Esther is concerned chiefly either to try to suppress her awareness of it, or to avert its threatened consequences by making everybody love her, Clennam's concern is with its origins. "'I want to know,'" he insists, as he is bounced from one bureaucrat to another in the Kafkaesque labyrinth of the Circumlocution Office, and his efforts to unravel the tangled affairs of the Dorrit family are as much directed towards extricating himself from the prison of guilt as they are towards freeing them from their literal prison, as his troubled thoughts during his first, accidental imprisonment reveal:

> Speculations . . . bearing the strangest relations towards the prison . . . ran like nightmares through his mind while he lay awake. Whether coffins were kept ready for people who might die there, where they were kept, how they were kept, where people who died in the prison were buried, how they were taken out, what forms were observed, whether an implacable creditor could arrest the dead. As to escaping, what chances were there of escape?
>
> . . . .
>
> And these involuntary starts of fancy were, after all, but the setting of a picture in which three people kept before him. His father . . . his mother . . . Little Dorrit . . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> What if his mother had an old reason she well knew for softening to this poor girl! What if the prisoner now sleeping quietly--Heaven grant it!--by the light of the great Day of Judgement should trace back his fall to her. What if any act of hers, and of his father's, should have even remotely brought the grey heads of those two brothers so low! (LD, pp. 88-89)

The association of ideas which shapes his meditation indicates the direction of his thoughts. He is haunted, first of all, by the fact of imprisonment itself, which he instinctively recognizes as an image of his own mental state. Hence, the uneasiness and near panic which one senses in the tone. The impossibility of escape, even perhaps in death, obsesses him, and the idea of imprisonment beyond the grave is linked in his thoughts directly with the problem of unexpiated guilt, as he moves from wondering whether a creditor could arrest the dead to a contemplation of his suspicions concerning his parents, and his fears for their status on the Day of Judgement. The picture which he conjures up of his mother, his father, and Little Dorrit as their innocent victim excludes himself, but his earlier actions reveal the intensity of his conviction that he must make himself personally responsible for the sins of his parents, whatever these might be:

> "If reparation can be made to anyone, if restitution can be made to any one, let us know it, and make it. Nay, mother, if within my means, let _me_ make it. I have seen so little happiness come of money; it has brought within my knowledge so little peace to this house, or to any one belonging to it; that it is worth less to me than to another. It can buy me nothing that will not be a reproach and misery to me, if I am haunted by a suspicion that it darkened my father's last hours with remorse, and that it is not honestly and justly mine." (_LD_, p. 49)

Clennam's efforts to resolve the problem of guilt by restitution and reparation unconsciously reflect his mother's influence. Her ledger-book religion has taught him that debts must be paid, and while he does not fall into her error of thinking that self-inflicted suffering absolves one of the guilt for having made another suffer, her perverse instruction has given him "no more real knowledge of the beneficent history of the New Testament," than if he had been bred among idolators" (_LD_, p. 30). He has rejected her hatred and vengefulness, but he has still not realized that forgiveness, according to "the beneficent history of the New Testament," is not so much something one earns, as something one must learn to accept. It is for this reason that his struggles to thread the labyrinth of the Circumlocution Office fail. Before he can be absolved of a guilt which he will eventually perceive directly and personally, he must experience to the full the helplessness of the imprisoned debtor who can do nothing to save himself.

Ultimately, prison will teach him "the right perception" (_LD_, p. 720), but before this can happen, the man whose life has encouraged him to be a dreamer (LD, p. 40), has to learn that turning one's back on the problem and retreating into dreams will not help him either. Clennam's dreams are a little like David Copperfield's in that they tend to centre around the image of a flower-like girl and a garden, a paradise of innocent happiness which represents the fantasy of escape. He seeks out Flora Finching, whose home is associated in his mind with the scent of "rose leaves and lavender . . . the remembrance . . . of the by-gone spring" (LD, p. 145). He remembers her as lily-like, a figure of innocent and fragile beauty, and is impelled to seek her out in what is clearly an impulse to escape, after his efforts on behalf of the Dorrits (and himself) have proven futile. But "Flora, whom he had left a lily, had become a peony" (LD, p. 150), and the "one tender recollection" to which he has clung, is exposed as "a piece of folly" (LD, p. 164).

It is at this point, unable to resolve the problem of guilt, frustrated in his hopes of Flora, near despair and likening the pattern of his life to "descending a green tree in fruit and flower, and seeing all the branches wither and drop off one by one, as he came down towards them" (LD, p. 165) that he begins to entertain the notion of allowing himself to fall in love with Pet Meagles. In another attempt to escape from the stifling reality of the prison-world into a garden of innocence and bliss, Clennam perceives the Meagles's home as an idyllic retreat emblematic of the family which inhabits it:

> It was a charming place (none the worse for being a little eccentric), on the road by the river, and just what the residence of the Meagles family ought to be. It stood in a garden, no doubt as fresh and beautiful in the May of the Year, as Pet now was in the May of her life; and it was defended by a goodly show of handsome trees and spreading evergreens, as Pet was by Mr. and Mrs. Meagles. It was made out of an old brick house, of which a

> part had been altogether pulled down, and another part had been changed into the present cottage; so there was a hale elderly portion, to represent Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, and a young picturesque, very pretty portion to represent Pet. There was even the later addition of a conservatory sheltering itself against it, uncertain of hue in its deep-stained glass, and in its more transparent portions flashing to the sun's rays, now like fire and now like harmless water drops; which might have stood for Tattycoram. (LD, p. 191)

Arthur sees in Pet (Dickens originally called her Baby, a name even more expressive of the child-like qualities Arthur is attracted to) not only the prospect of recapturing the "by-gone spring" associated with Flora, but in the family in general, the possibility of an existence in direct contrast to his own. Where his own life appears to him as a withered tree, the Meagles have survived into old age as evergreens. Their house, a cottage set in the midst of a garden, represents a green oasis of innocence far away from the tomb-like prison of his mother's house, while even the changing passions of the flawed Tattycoram are metamorphosed in this vision into the beauty of deep-stained glass and harmless water drops.

Most of Dickens's adult heroes, from the novelist's middle period onward, are shown to be drawn to the dream of innocence as a refuge from reality, and in each case, Dickens reveals the dream to be an illusion. Martin Chuzzlewit seeks out Pecksniff, "the Wiltshire Adam," and then later embarks on both a literal and a metaphorical quest for "Eden." David Copperfield idealizes the Wickfield establishment, epitomized by the saintly Agnes, but in that dwelling encounters the serpent-like Uriah Heep. Esther tries to find refuge in Bleak House, but discovers that it cannot shut out the sickness that infects the city. Clennam's faint stirrings of hope are equally illusory. Although his imagination pictures what the Meagles's estate would look like if it were May, it is autumn, and their pastoral retreat, in spite of its air of life, growth, and beauty, is morally connected with the world of the Circumlocution Office through Mr. Meagles's naive participation in its corrupt values:

> Clennam could not help speculating . . . whether there might be in the breast of this honest, affectionate, and cordial Mr. Meagles, any microscopic portion of the mustard-seed that had sprung up into the great tree of the Circumlocution Office. (LD, p. 194)

The innocent Pet, too, has mistakenly given her love to the unworthy Henry Gowan, and the effect of Clennam's double disappointment shakes his sense of his own identity (he describes his pain as "nobody's" [LD, p. 200]), and turns the sunny vistas of the Meagles's garden world into a place of darkness and sorrow:

> The rain fell heavily on the roof, and pattered on the ground, and dripped among the evergreens, and the leafless branches of the trees. The rain fell heavily, drearily. It was a night of tears. (LD, p. 209)

(Little Dorrit's gift of flowers to the imprisoned Arthur may appear, on the surface, to represent the ultimate satisfaction of Arthur's yearning for lost gardens, the kind of yearning that Auden describes in "Dingley Dell and the Fleet" as Arcadian.[23] I do not, however, for reasons I shall present later, believe this to be the case.)

Dickens's heroes are not allowed to fulfill their dreams of an innocent paradise because Dickens, from about the time of Barnaby Rudge onwards, tends increasingly to equate the impulse to retreat with selfish escapism. In Little Dorrit the alternative to retreat is symbolized by the partnership which Clennam forms with Daniel Doyce. The novel contains other examples of partnerships, but they are flawed and distorted by the twisted values of the partners. Mrs.

Clennam and Flintwich, for example, are united only by their mutual hostility and antagonism. Casby, whose relationship with Pancks suggests a kind of partnership, uses the latter much as Fascination Fledgeby will use Riah in Our Mutual Friend--as a blind behind which to conceal his own rapaciousness. Only in the case of Doyce and Clennam is the partnership entered upon by partners whose main concern is to serve, rather than to exploit, each other.

Clennam's partnership with Doyce, although it founders temporarily when Clennam succumbs to "Merdle's complaint," is also important because Dickens uses it to suggest the proper use of the imagination. I have already discussed at some length the role of fantasy in the lives of many of the characters in Little Dorrit. For most, as we have seen, it is an instrument of evasion, a means for creating private and unreal worlds in which one can try to escape the reality of suffering and injustice. To claim that Dickens rejects this response as escapist[24] is not to imply, however, that he advocates instead the harsh empiricism of Gradgrind's world of arid "facts." The novel suggests instead that imagination, when it is not wasted on futile withdrawal into illusion, is a powerful instrument for good, the faculty which enables one to break out of self-imprisoning isolation; as John Stuart Mill puts it, "the power by which one human being enters into the mind and circumstances of another."[25] To be really effective, however, the visionary faculty which can come up with ideas for the improvement of society must be joined with a down-to-earth common sense that can figure out how to put those ideas into operation. This, I submit, is what is meant by Mr. Meagles's eccentric use of the word practicality, and it is further illustrated by the alliance between Doyce and Clennam.

Doyce represents imagination and creativity. He is an inventor, and although he is not an artist in the strict sense of the word,[26] but an engineer, Dickens makes it abundantly clear that the capacity for invention is a function of the creative imagination. Doyce is, "though a plain man . . . too much accustomed to combine what was original and daring in conception with what was patient and minute in execution, to be by any means an ordinary man" (LD, p. 188). The atmosphere of his workshop is "at once [both] fanciful and practical" (LD, p. 267). We are never told what he has invented; what is stressed is the fact that it is "of great importance to his country and his fellow-creatures" (LD, p. 119), and that his efforts to put it into production have nothing whatever to do with any selfish desire for wealth or fame. Unlike Henry Gowan, an artist who saunters into the arts "at a leisurely Pall Mall pace" (LD, p. 206), and who cheerfully admits that his pretence of being "'devoted to my art, and giving up many solitary days to it, and abandoning many pleasures for it, . . . and all the rest of it'" (LD, p. 402) is pure illusion, Doyce regards his own gifts as a sacred trust. Imagination, he tells Clennam, is meant to be used to benefit one's fellow man:

> "It is much to be regretted," said Clennam, "that you ever turned your thoughts that way, Mr. Doyce."
>
> "True, sir, true to a certain extent. But what is a man to do? If he has the misfortune to strike out something serviceable to the nation, he must follow where it leads him."
>
> "Hadn't he better let it go?" asked Clennam.
>
> "He can't do it," said Doyce, shaking his head with a thoughtful smile. "It's not put into his head to be buried. It's put into his head to be made useful. You hold your life on the condition that to the last you shall struggle hard for it. Every man holds a discovery on the same terms."
>
> "That is to say," said Arthur, with a growing admiration of his quiet companion, "you are not finally discouraged even now?"

> "I have no right to be, if I am," returned the other. "The thing is as true as it ever was." (LD, pp. 189-90)

The gift of imagination is not given one to deaden the pain of living in a prison world, nor to assist one in effecting selfish and illusory retreats from it: "'it's put into one's head to be useful.'"

Doyce at first tends to reject the notion that he needs a partner, noting ruefully the world's opinion that he, as an inventor, must "'be supposed to want common sense'" (LD, p. 190). Nevertheless, he does decide, after all, that he needs someone, and it is Clennam whom he selects, describing him as "'a man of sense'" (LD, p. 515), and a man to whom he can entrust "'the ways and means of turning the business arising from it [his invention] to the best account'" (LD, p. 198). Mr. Meagles sums up the partnership by commenting:

> "I say to both of you . . . that you are well-matched. You keep him in check, Clennam, with your common sense, and you stick to the Works, Dan, with your--"
>
> "Uncommon sense?" suggested Daniel, with his quiet smile.
>
> "You may call it so, if you like--and each of you will be a right hand to the other." (LD, p. 266)

In identifying Clennam with common sense, I do not of course mean to imply that Doyce is to be judged as guilty of unrealistic dreaming. Rather, Clennam takes on the more practical responsibility for the day-to-day affairs of the firm, leaving Doyce free to do what he does best. It is Clennam who decides to go on with the business of badgering the Circumlocution Office on Doyce's behalf, even after Daniel is ready to give up (LD, p. 517). Clennam's practicality in the business of the partnership is, I think, an aspect of his practical understanding of the meaning of restitution and reparation:

> The shadow of a supposed act of injustice, which had hung over him since his father's death, was so vague and formless that it might be the result of a reality widely remote from his idea of it.

> But, if his apprehensions should prove to be well-founded, he was ready at any moment to lay down all he had, and begin the world anew. As the fierce dark teaching of his childhood had never sunk into his heart, so the first article in his code of morals was, that he must begin in practical humility, with looking well to his feet on Earth, and that he could never mount on wings of words to Heaven. (LD, p. 319)

The collapse of the partnership is inevitable. The novel ultimately reveals a kind of Christian pessimism about man's ability to achieve redemption through his own efforts. Although some of Clennam's responses to his situation are clearly less harmful, less misdirected than others (the partnership is obviously a less mistaken response than the dream of blissful gardens), all of them ultimately fail as a result of the power of the world to corrupt even that which is best in men. Clennam ruins himself and the firm when, for laudably unselfish reasons, he tries to bypass the work which is for Dickens the only legitimate way to acquire wealth, and invests the firm's capital in one of Merdle's speculative schemes. He is infected by a moral disease which, like Esther's small-pox, symbolizes the corrupt atmosphere of a sinful society and its damaging effects upon decent and well-intentioned individuals:

> Bred at first, as many physical diseases are, in the wickedness of men, and then disseminated in their ignorance, these epidemics, after a period, get communicated to many sufferers who are neither ignorant nor wicked. (LD, p. 582)

In his desire to make life easier for Daniel Doyce by acquiring wealth through speculation, instead of satisfying himself with the modest competence to be achieved by hard work, Clennam allows himself to be drawn back into the world of the idle dreamers who try to achieve a false "innocence" by ignoring the command: "Thou shalt eat thy bread in the sweat of thy face."

In Clennam's predicament after the partnership has fallen into bankruptcy, one sees Dickens's paradigm for the plight of fallen man. Human sinfulness, throughout the novel, is symbolized by financial indebtedness, an analogy obviously suggested by the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," which Dickens directly quotes (LD, p. 47). Clennam, burdened by debts which he cannot possibly repay, his efforts to balance the ledger by bargaining with his creditors (LD, p. 716) rejected out of hand (LD, p. 718), finds himself helpless, experiencing the prison as a hell from which he can see no escape:

> Night after night, he had risen from his bed of wretchedness at twelve or one o'clock, and had sat at his window watching the sickly lamps in the yard, and looking upward for the first wan trace of day, hours before it was possible that the sky could show it to him. Now, when the night came, he could not even persuade himself to undress.
>
> For a burning restlessness set in, an agonized impatience of the prison, and a conviction that he was going to break his heart and die there, which caused him indescribable suffering. His dread and hatred of the place became so intense that he felt it a labour to draw his breath in it. The sensation of being stifled so overpowered him, that he would stand at the window holding his throat and gasping. At the same time, a longing for other air, and a yearning to be beyond the blind blank wall, made him feel as if he must go mad with the ardour of the desire. (LD, p. 745)

In a scene foreshadowing the encounter between Pip and Orlick in the lime kiln, the devil comes to gloat over him in prison. Rigaud not only taunts Clennam with the failure of his efforts to forestall his destiny by trying to live unselfishly, referring to him contemptuously as "man of virtue" and "imbecile" (LD, p. 747), he also insists, to Clennam's "indignant wonder," on their common identity as "fellow-jail-bird[s]" (LD, p. 742).

Clennam's release (metaphorically, if not literally) is finally effected by Little Dorrit, who functions as a redemptive figure in the world of the novel. She is clearly an innocent, but Dickens's understanding of what that means is much more profound, and at the same time, much more realistic than his early portraits of innocence. Innocence as a moral ideal is, as one will recall, for the young Dickens, inextricably associated with the image of the child, and the children and child-like adults who figure so prominently in the early novels are characterized to a considerable extent by their appealing helplessness and vulnerability. Pickwick, for example, is only able to move with relative safety through the dangerous world of street and prison because he is guided and defended by Sam. When innocence is deprived of that kind of protection, as Oliver is, its situation becomes very precarious indeed. Oliver is only finally saved from destruction by the timely intervention of Mr. Brownlow and the Maylies. They interpose themselves between the child and his demonic adversary, and spirit Oliver off to a pastoral world which successfully excludes the perilous reality which surrounds it.

In The Old Curiosity Shop one begins to see a certain waning of Dickens's confidence in the ability and in the will of benevolent guardians to rescue the innocent from physical and moral danger. Nell's ultimate safety is to be found only in death. Nevertheless, while Dickens's faith in the ability of innocence to survive the onslaughts of a wicked world shows certain signs of weakening, his belief in innocence as a moral ideal remains essentially unshaken. Nell represents an ideal, even if it is an ideal which can only be preserved by death.

With Barnaby Rudge, however, one begins to detect some ambiguity in Dickens's attitude to innocence. Barnaby is unquestionably child-like, unquestionably innocent, but his innocence is shown to be inadequate to cope with the evil that surrounds him. In Martin Chuzzlewit, Tom Pinch, another child-like innocent, is told unequivocally that his ignorance of evil is a handicap, not a virtue.

One can perhaps see then, in the line of development which stretches from Pickwick to Chuzzlewit, certain stirrings of dissatisfaction with the concept of innocence as those earlier novels defined it. The uneasiness centres less on the concept per se than on the ability of the child-like figure to combat evil successfully. Innocence itself, however much of a disadvantage it may be in a fallen world, is still depicted as an immensely appealing quality, and part of that appeal resides in its very helplessness, the weakness or vulnerability which Philippe Ariès remarked upon in his analysis of the post-renaissance cult of the child.

Little Dorrit, the true innocent of the novel, for all the superficially child-like aspects of her physical appearance, and for all the quiet gentleness of her nature, does not exhibit either helplessness, nor any particular need for protection. It is, in fact, a measure of Arthur Clennam's self-deception that he should believe she does. Hers is an innocence which is associated with strength, not weakness, and the difference between her nature and the attributes Dickens had apparently earlier assumed to be essential to innocence is best illustrated by his portraits of Maggy and Mr. Dorrit. Both are ambiguous characters, clearly child-like in a number of important respects, exhibiting both the helplessness and the naivete traditionally associated with innocence, but both are depicted as functioning within the prison-world of the novel in ways which reveal the inadequacy of childhood as a moral ideal for fallen adults.

Maggy is the more obviously child-like of the two. A full-grown woman whose mental development ceased when she was only ten, she cuts an even more outlandish figure than Barnaby Rudge:

> She was about eight-and-twenty, with large bones, large features, large feet and hands, large eyes, and no hair. Her large eyes were limpid and almost colourless; they seemed to be very little affected by light, and to stand unnaturally still. There was also that attentive listening expression in her face, which is seen in the faces of the blind; but she was not blind, having one tolerably serviceable eye. Her face was not exceedingly ugly, though it was only redeemed from being so by a smile; a good-humoured smile, and pleasant in itself, but rendered pitiable by being constantly there. A great white cap, with a quantity of opaque frilling that was always flapping about, apologised for Maggy's baldness, and made it so very difficult for her old black bonnet to retain its place upon her head, that it held on round her neck like a gipsy's baby. (LD, p. 100)

Maggy, of course, is obviously a simpleton, and her "innocence" is just as obviously little more than sheer ignorance. Nevertheless, the very fact that this is so obvious is itself worthy of note as an indication of how far Dickens had come since Barnaby Rudge. Maggy enjoys the kind of perpetual childhood which Mrs. Rudge thanked God her similarly afflicted child would never lose; Maggy "was never to be any more than ten years old, however long she lived" (LD, p. 102), but Dickens's description of her suggests what a grotesque anomaly that involves. Maggy's tall, raw-boned frame, combined with her bald head which is covered by something that looks like an out-sized baby's bonnet, makes her look as if the head of an over-grown infant had been monstrously grafted onto the body of an adult woman, while her idiot grin, and blank, colourless eyes hint at the moral blindness which an inability to move into responsible adulthood entails. It is also significant that Maggy's child-like state is the result of disease and mistreatment:

> "When Maggy was ten years old . . . she had a bad fever, sir, and she has never grown any older ever since." (LD, p. 101)

She is certainly child-like, as her dependence on her "little Mother" reveals, but her eternal childhood is not a mark of moral superiority but misfortune, a consequence of the sickness and cruelty which are consequences of man's fall.

The portrait of Maggy, then, can be interpreted (as can Barnaby's) as a pointed comment on the sentimental exaltation of the state of childhood as a moral ideal. Barnaby, however, had a certain poetic quality to soften his portrait; Maggy is simply grotesque. Earlier in this chapter I discussed some of the ways in which fallen man in this novel seeks to cope with existence, and characterized the principal methods as vengeance, exploitation, and deception. Maggy, it seems to me, represents yet another possible response to the problem, one ultimately as futile as all the others, but superficially more appealing. Christ's advice to his followers when they asked him how they ought to live was to become like little children: "'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven'" (Matt., 18:3). On that basis, Maggy ought to be one of the blessed ones. She has no need to become like a little child; she has never stopped being one. What Maggy really represents, however, is the world's misunderstanding of what it means to be spiritually child-like. Maggy's innocence is little more than ignorance and an inability to look after herself, a state to be pitied, not imitated. In most other respects Maggy exhibits much the same attitudes as everyone else in the novel. Pathetic as Maggy is, victimized as she certainly has been, there is some evidence to suggest that she has absorbed at least some of the corrupt moral values of the world she lives in. The sense of personal injury which is so marked a characteristic of the inhabitants of Little Dorrit's prison-world, and which is prized by many of them as a token of distinction, is evidenced by Maggy as well. She is not only "very susceptible to personal slights, and very ingenious in inventing them" (LD, p. 291), she is very jealous lest anyone should seem to suffer more than she:

> "Well, and if you cry to ease your head, Little Mother, let me cry too. Don't go and have all the crying to yourself," expostulated Maggy, "that an't not being greedy." And immediately began to blubber. (LD, p. 292)

She also appears to be a little over-fond of reminding her audience that she is only "'ten year old, poor thing'" (LD, p. 191), a habit which hints at something much more clearly indicated in Mr. Dorrit--the way in which a state resembling childhood and its attendent helplessness can be pressed into service as a means of eliciting sympathy and evading adult responsibility.

Mr. Dorrit, the ironically titled "Father of the Marshalsea," is in some ways another child trapped in the body of an adult. He is already middle-aged when he begins his long imprisonment, but he looks and acts like a terrified child:[27]

> "What am I do do! Oh, good heaven, what am I to do!" . . . The turnkey conducted him--trembling from head to foot, and constantly crying under his breath, What was he to do! while his irresolute fingers bedabbled the tears upon his face--up one of the common staircases in the prison. (LD, p. 60)

The turnkey, told that his prisoner is expecting an addition to his family, wagers with himself "'which is the helplessest, the unborn baby or [Mr. Dorrit]'" (LD, p. 59), and takes his charge in tow with the firmness of the governess or nursemaid Mr. Dorrit so obviously needs:

> "Don't waste your time in clasping your hands and biting your fingers . . . but come along with me." (LD, p. 60)

Mr. Dorrit consciously cultivates the image of himself as child-like in unworldliness, and in a tone half-boasting, half-whining, cautions Arthur Clennam:

> "I know very little of the world, sir . . . It would be worth no man's while to mislead me; it would really be too easy--too poor a success, to yield any satisfaction." (LD, p. 80)

He uses his helplessness to exploit his daughter, forcing her to play Little Mother to him as well as to Maggy:

> He burst into tears of maudlin pity for himself, and at length suffering her to embrace him, and take charge of him, let his grey head rest against her cheek, and bewail his wretchedness. (LD, p. 228)

Little Dorrit, in fact, cradles each of them in turn, as if they were not just children, but actual babies:

> [Maggy] became querulous about the cold, and shivered and whimpered. "It will soon be over, dear," said Little Dorrit, patiently. "Oh it's all very fine for you, little mother," returned Maggy, "but I'm a poor thing, only ten years old." At last, in the dead of the night . . . Little Dorrit laid the heavy head upon her bosom, and soothed her to sleep. (LD, p. 174)

The child is an important figure in Dickens's scheme of things, and innocence and the image of the child are, for him, very closely related. But the child image is easily beclouded by sentimentality and stock responses--as Harold Skimpole, the fake innocent of Bleak House, knows very well. Skimpole ruthlessly exploits those responses with the utmost art. Mr. Dorrit, on the other hand, is only very occasionally aware of what he is doing. In Little Dorrit Dickens further clarifies our understanding of the nature of innocence by divorcing it from physical childhood. The novel contains no actual children; instead, Dickens projects various attributes of childhood onto adult figures. Maggy and Mr. Dorrit between them represent those attributes of childhood which tend to diminish or negate the figure of the child as an effective moral force, while Little Dorrit embodies those qualities which make real innocence a powerful counterforce to the evil of a fallen world.

Little Dorrit's role as the embodiment of innocence is symbolically suggested in part by an encounter with Rigaud which hints at her Una-like moral identity through its obvious parallels with an episode in The Faerie Queene. Una/Truth, deserted by the Red Cross Knight, is defended by a lion who instinctively reverences her virtue:

> The Lyon would not leave her desolate,
> But with her went along, as a strong gard
> Of her chast person, and a faythful mate
> Of her sad troubles, and misfortunes hard:
> Still, when she slept, he kept both watch and ward:
> And, when she wakt, he wayted diligent,
> With humble service to her will prepard:
> From her fayre eye he tooke commandement,
> And ever by her lookes conceived her intent.[28]

As Amy recoils from Rigaud's baleful glare, Gowan's dog, the significantly named "Lion," whose head she has caressed, tries to hurl himself against Rigaud and is only restrained from doing so by his master's brutal kicks (LD, p. 494). In addition, her moral affinity with characters like Oliver and Nell is suggested by her child-like appearance which has the power to soften Mrs. Clennam's harshness, and to inspire compassion in the heart of a London prostitute.

But where the other child-like figures of the novel, Maggy and Mr. Dorrit, are characterized primarily by a helplessness which makes them burdensome to others, Little Dorrit is remarkable for her quiet efficiency and competence. In a world which prizes the useless white hands of the gentleman, Clennam notes her "quick little pair of busy hands" (LD, p. 53). Innocent, but far from helpless, she becomes the "head of the fallen family" (LD, p. 72), apprentices Fanny to a dancing master, tries to find some career for her useless brother, Tip, and endeavours to protect her father's illusions from a reality she knows he is too weak to face.

F. R. Leavis calls Little Dorrit the "test of reality"[29] throughout the novel, and in so doing identifies one of the most significant areas of difference between her and the child-like innocents of Dickens's earliest works. Pickwick, as one will recall, spends a good part of his career sublimely impervious to the evil that surrounds him; Oliver is easily deceived by Fagin's apparent generosity; and Little Nell's inability to distinguish friend from foe causes her to flee from both. Little Dorrit's outstanding characteristic, however, is her clear perception of reality. Her sister comments wonderingly:

> "You can make your way anywhere, I believe. I couldn't have managed it, Amy, though I know so much more of the world." (LD, p. 234)

Amy can make her way anywhere because, like Caveletto, who resembles her in some significant ways, she always knows where she is. She is born into the prison which is Dickens's metaphor for a world under judgement. This identification, which seems almost too obvious to require elaboration, is suggested in part by the links between the pictures of Egypt groaning under God's wrath during the time of the Exodus which hang on Mrs. Clennam's walls, "made the dimmer for the fly and smoke plagues of London" (LD, p. 33), and the clouds of flies which torment Little Dorrit's mother as she gives birth to her:

> "The flies trouble you don't they, my dear?" said Mrs. Bangham. "But p'raps they'll take your mind off it, and do you good. What between the buryin' ground, the grocer's, the wagon-stables, and the paunch trade, the Marshalsea flies gets very large. P'raps they're sent as a consolation, if we only know'd it." (LD, p. 61)

Born on an oppressively hot summer afternoon in "the debtor's confined chamber," its "walls and ceilings . . . blackened by flies" (LD, p. 61), attended by a frowzy midwife and a "ghastly medical scarecrow" (LD, p. 60) of a doctor, who wait out her mother's labour by getting drunk, Little Dorrit epitomizes in her birth the human condition in a fallen world. Most of the characters in the novel, as we have seen, respond to their situation with evasion or despair. Little Dorrit's family, for example, try to deny the reality of their imprisonment by spinning elaborate fantasies about their exalted rank. Mr. Dorrit, in particular, adopts the moral inversions of the prison doctor's speech in which imprisonment becomes "liberty," and irresponsibility, "peace":

> "We are quiet here; we don't get badgered here; there is no knocker here, sir, to be hammered at by creditors and bring a man's heart into his mouth. . . . It's freedom, sir, it's freedom! . . . Elsewhere, people are restless, worried, hurried about, anxious respecting one thing, anxious respecting another. Nothing of the kind here sir. . . . we have got to the bottom, we can't fall, and what have we found? Peace. That's the word for it. Peace." (LF, p. 63)

Arthur Clennam, on the other hand, who cannot fool himself so easily, chooses despair. But Amy does neither. She has from the very beginning an intuitive understanding that the prison is a prison:

> . . . she was a very, very little creature indeed, when she had somehow gained the knowledge, that her clasp of her father's hand was to be always loosened at the door which the great key opened. (LD, p. 69)

And she responds to that knowledge, not with bitterness and despair, but with sympathy and compassion, "a pitiful and plaintive look" which encompasses not only her father, "her wayward sister and [her] idle brother," but all "the faded crowd" (LD, p. 69) enclosed by the shadow of the Marshalsea.

Her compassion springs from a special kind of knowledge which is the mark of her innocence. A sentimental view of innocence tends to equate it with ignorance, but as Dickens showed in Barnaby Rudge, or as Richard Hughes a century later was to describe it in High Wind in Jamaica,[30] such a condition is as likely to be as productive of evil as of good. This is not what is meant by the theological concept of innocence, and it does not apply to Little Dorrit. Her innocence is not so much a child-like, as a Christ-like quality:[31] she is in the world, but not of it, harmless as a dove, but wise as a serpent, a sinless being who has an intuitive grasp of goodness which makes it possible for her both to recognize and to avoid evil. The fallen state, according to Milton, is precisely the opposite of this. Sinful man, he tells us in Areopagitica, knows evil directly, but goodness only dimly and indirectly through comparison with it:

> Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned, that those confused seeds which were imposed upon Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out and sort assunder were not more intermixed. It was from out the rind of one apple tasted that the knowledge of good and evil as two twins cleaving together leaped forth into the world. And

> perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say, of knowing good by evil.[32]

Little Dorrit, however, knows the good, not by experience of evil, but intuitively, and because she knows the good, she can recognize the evil all the more clearly:

> . . . how much, or how little of the wretched truth it pleased God to make visible to her, lies hidden with many mysteries. (LD, p. 71)

She sees the good, she understands the evil, and she chooses the good:

> It is enough that she was inspired to be something which was not what the rest were, and to be that something, different and laborious, for the sake of the rest. (LD, p. 71)

In so choosing, she fulfills Milton's definition of the Christian, the imitator of Christ:

> He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian.[33]

Little Dorrit, as Ronald Librach among others has pointed out, is filled with religious imagery, and the significance of that imagery, too obvious to be denied, has been the subject of considerable scholarly debate in recent years. The question is not so much whether Little Dorrit is indeed, to repeat Trilling's evocative phrase, the "Paraclete in female form," but whether as such she succeeds in fulfilling any truly redemptive role. Ronald Librach argues that she does,[34] but Rupert Roopnaraine disagrees:

> Consistent with the bleak vision that informs the entire work, the ending is achingly devoid of optimism, of anything that is even potentially redemptive.[35]

The whole issue of Dickens's religious beliefs is a thorny one, which may be the reason Lionel Trilling so carefully, and probably wisely, tiptoes around it. Recent critics, like Bert Hornback, while finding plenty of evidence of concern with issues like innocence, redemption and so forth, have argued that the Christian religion itself was, for Dickens, a superficial and sentimental system of belief which he outgrew as he matured.[36] I disagree with Hornback on this point, but a much more central issue is whether or not Little Dorrit is structured around a Christian allegory of the fall and man's redemption from it. I believe that it is, and that such an allegory is a natural development of Dickens's life-long concern with the problem of evil and suffering. The attempt to account for the suffering of the apparently innocent victim, which is the problem confronted by most of the early novels, leads Dickens ultimately to a perception of what, for want of a better term, one might as well call the fallen nature of the world. If he had gone no further, we might had had, as an expression of his final position, something like Bleak House, without even an ambiguously happy ending. In Little Dorrit, however, he moves beyond that stark vision to consider the problem of redemption, and Little Dorrit becomes the Christ-like instrument of that redemption.

She is Christ-like not only in that she is an innocent being born into a fallen world, but in her willingness to take upon herself the suffering of others:

> [She] was the head of the fallen family; and bore, in her own heart, its anxieties and shames. (LD, p. 72)

The Biblical echo is obvious: "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4--the Suffering Servant Passage), and the buried allusion to Christ is, I think, reinforced by the description of her as head of the fallen family.

Her clarity of vision is such that she is instinctively repelled by Rigaud: "she was inclined to shrink and tremble; for the appearance of this traveller was particularly disagreeable to her" (LD, p. 444). Rigaud, as the devil, is the only one of all the characters to receive her outright condemnation: "'he is so revolting to me . . . that his being away from here, at present, is quite a relief to my mind'" (LD, p. 552). Her attitude toward others, however, tempers a clear perception of their follies and sinfulness with a deep compassion and understanding. This is most marked in her attitude to her father. When he tries to encourage her to pretend to be in love with John Chivery for the sake of the family's comfort in prison, to engage, in effect, in a subtle form of prostitution, she understands exactly what he is suggesting, but she neither rejects nor condemns him. Instead, she listens in a deeply compassionate, sorrowful silence which has the effect of rousing within the old man at least a glimmer of shame:

> His voice died away, as if she could not bear the pain of hearing him, and her hand had gradually crept to his lips. For a little while, there was a dead silence and stillness; and he remained shrunk in his chair, and she remained with her arm round his neck, and her head bowed down upon his shoulder. (LD, p. 227)

In her willingness to bear the shames and anxieties of her family in her own heart, she superficially resembles Esther Summerson in capacity for self-sacrifice, but Esther's habit of self-denial is not, as we have seen, nearly as other-regarding as she would like to believe. Esther sees her mysterious birth as a secret crime for which she must atone by endless self-denial, an activity which involves her in deep internal conflict. Amy, however, tries neither to deny nor to exaggerate her prison birth, a similarly flawed origin, and when her father collapses, babbling of the Marshalsea and exposing not only the family's hitherto carefully concealed past, but the shameful secret of his daughter's birth as well, Little Dorrit's concern is only for him:

> "Ladies and gentlemen, the duty--ha--devolves upon me of--hum--welcoming you to the Marshalsea. Welcome to the Marshalsea! . . . Those who are habituated to the--ha--Marshalsea, are pleased to call me its Father. I am accustomed to be complimented by strangers as the--ha--Father of the Marshalsea. Certainly, if years of residence may establish a claim to so--ha--honourable a title, I may accept the--hum--conferred distinction. My child, ladies and gentlemen. My daughter. Born here!"
>
> She was not ashamed of it, or ashamed of him. She was pale and frightened; but she had no other care than to soothe him and get him away, for his own dear sake. (LD, p. 648)

Because Little Dorrit is strong enough to accept the fact that she was both born into and lives in a sinful world, she has no need to employ any of the methods used by the rest of the world to evade or deny that reality. Her family sees her prison birth, as Esther Summerson tends to see her own, as conferring a special taint which sets her apart from more fortunate beings. Fanny explains her sister's defective awareness of the family's dignity:

> "I was not born where you were, you know, Amy, and perhaps that makes a difference." (LD, p. 237)

Her uncle, although normally her chivalrous defender, at one point, much to Clennam's distaste, speaks complacently of her efforts on the family's behalf as her "duty" (LD, pl 94), and after their release from the prison, the whole family conspires to deny the past. (Mr. Dorrit, in fact, seems to think that through his wealth he has been reborn as a "gentleman unsoiled, unspotted" (LD, p. 479), an interesting link with the theme of society's faith in the redemptive power of money, as exemplified by Merdle, the false Messiah.) The notion of duty, the denial of the past, the perception of her birth in prison as something which separates Little Dorrit from others--all these ideas and responses are evidence of attitudes which lead to division and isolation. Little Dorrit, however, is characterized by a wholeness which stands in marked contrast to the fragmented lives of Esther and of the Dorrit family. Amy does what she can to help others, not out of a sense of duty or a sense of guilt, which, as in Esther's case, frequently involves division within the self, but out of an unselfconscious compassion "inspired to be something, different and laborious for the sake of others." Her quiet acceptance of her prison birth, instead of isolating her from others, as Esther's perception of her origins does, unites Little Dorrit in sympathy with the whole "faded crowd," and in her family's European travels, she mingles past and present in her dreams in an attempt to validate the present by uniting it with the past they have denied:

> Do you know that since the change in our fortunes, though I appear to myself to have dreamed more than before, I have always dreamed of myself as very young indeed! . . . I have dreamed of going down to Mrs. General, with the patches on my clothes in which I can first remember myself. I have over and over again dreamed of taking my place at dinner in Venice when we have had a large company, in the mourning for my poor mother which I wore when I was eight years old. (LD, p. 554)

A Christ-figure in her wholeness, her innocence, and her compassionate and unselfconscious love, she becomes finally an instrument of redemption for Arthur. She comes to see him in prison, bringing flowers and life to that dead world:

> . . . some abiding impression of a garden stole over him--a garden of flowers, with a damp warm wind gently stirring their scents. . . . Beside the tea-cup on his table he saw, then, a blooming nosegay: a wonderful handful of the choicest and most lovely flowers.
>
> Nothing had ever appeared so beautiful in his sight. He

> took them up and inhaled their fragrance, and he lifted them to his hot head, and he put them down and opened his parched hands to them, as cold hands are opened to receive the cheering of a fire. (LD, pp. 755-56)

With flowers for his "parched hands," regenerative tears "dropping on him as the rain from heaven had dropped upon the flowers," clad in "her old, worn dress" (LD, p. 756) (in this context, an image evocative of the Incarnation), Little Dorrit comes to him to begin the process of his redemption. Earlier, I had discussed the failure of Clennam's attempts to recapture the lost garden-world of the past. An emblem of the frustration of that dream is contained in the scene in which he sadly relinquishes Pet's gift of flowers to the river (LD, 338). A gift of flowers figures prominently in Little Dorrit's symbolic visit to him in prison, and the reader is entitled to ask whether this represents a more successful fulfillment of what Auden calls the "Arcadian dream."[37] I do not, however, believe that a careful examination of the scene and its consequences supports that interpretation.

The Arcadian dream, says Auden, is an important aspect of Dickens's fiction, and must be distinguished from another kind of dream which it in some ways resembles:

> Our dream pictures of the Happy Place where suffering and evil are unknown are of two kinds, the Edens and the New Jerusalems. Though it is possible for the same individual to imagine both, it is unlikely that his interest in both will be equal and I suspect that between the Arcadian whose favorite day dream is of Eden, and the Utopian whose favorite day dream is of New Jerusalem, there is a characterological gulf as unbridgeable as that between Blake's Prolifics and Devourers.[38]

The primary difference between Eden and New Jerusalem, between the Arcadian and the Utopian, is "a temporal one":

> Eden is a past world in which contradictions of the present world

> have not yet arisen; New Jerusalem is a future world in which they have at last been resolved.[39]

Above all, says Auden, "the backward-looking Arcadian knows that his expulsion from Eden is an irrevocable fact and that his dream, therefore, is a wish-dream which cannot become real"[40]

Clennam's earlier feeble efforts (their half-heartedness is perhaps evidence of a partial recognition of their futility) to return to the garden-world are all strongly associated with the past, as we have seen. But these flowers are given him by Little Dorrit, and the effect of her visit is to release him from the past. There is an almost ritualistic quality to the scene in which she given him, to burn unread, the document which would reveal to him both his illegitimate birth and the secret of his family's sins against the Dorrits:

> ". . . I want you to burn something for me."
> "What?"
> "Only this folded paper. If you will put it in the fire with your own hand, just as it is, my fancy will be gratified."
> "Superstitious, darling Little Dorrit? Is it a charm?"
> "It is anything you like best, my own," she answered, laughing with glistening eyes and standing on tiptoe to kiss him, "if you will only humour me when the fire burns up."
> So they stood before the fire waiting: Clennam with his arm about her waist, and the fire shining, as fire in that same place had often shone, in Little Dorrit's eyes. "Is it bright enough now?" said Arthur. "Quite bright enough now," said Little Dorrit. "Does the charm want any words to be said?" asked Arthur, as he held the paper over the flame. "You can say (if you don't mind) 'I love you!'" answered Little Dorrit. So he said it, and the paper burned away. (LD, p. 825)

By this action, as she takes to herself the knowledge of both guilty secrets (another example of her willingness to bear "in her own heart, their anxieties and shames"), she releases Clennam both from the past and from the prison of himself. As the final lines of the novel suggest, Amy's relationship with Clennam is one which impells him out into the actual, towards the future, instead of providing him with refuge in an idealized past. In addition, the curious association of the flowers with both warmth and water (he opens his "parched" hands to them, and holds his cold hands out to them as if "to receive the cheering of a fire") reiterate the point that Little Dorrit's gift is essentially one of life rather than dreams.

Arthur needs to be redeemed because he is fallen, imprisoned for debts he cannot repay. He is finally released from the Marshalsea, not by making the strict restitution and reparation that he had been brought up to believe was the key,[41] but by learning to accept, as Esther did in Bleak House, freely offered love and forgiveness. At first it is difficult for him to do this. When Little Dorrit first visits him in prison and confesses her love, he gratefully acknowledges it, but feels unworthy to receive it:

> "I put this parting kiss upon your cheek, my child--who might have been more near to me, who never could have been more dear--a ruined man far removed from you, forever separated from you, whose course is run, while yours is but beginning." (LD, p. 760)

Clennam's literal release from imprisonment is effected by Daniel Doyce, who, successful in business ventures in the Middle East after the collapse of the English branch of the firm, returns to "put matters right," and reinstate Arthur as his partner. The main point of his action has nothing to do with whatever financial arrangements Doyce has had to make on Clennam's behalf (none are mentioned); of much more importance is the attitude of understanding and forgiveness which informs his announcement:

> ". . . not a word more from you about the past. There was an error in your calculations. I know what that is. It affects the whole machine, and failure is the consequence. You will profit by the failure, and will avoid it another time. I have

> done a similar thing myself, in construction, often. Every failure teaches a man something, if he will learn; and you are too sensible a man not to learn from this failure.
>
> . . . .
>
> . . . your old place awaits you, and wants you very much; there is nothing to detain you here, one half-hour longer." (LD, p. 824)

But before this happens, Clennam has already accepted Little Dorrit's love. Doyce's actions simply express what has already symbolically taken place--Clennam's release from the prison of his own guilt and anguish. This comes about when Little Dorrit shows him that none of the barriers he had imagined between them have any reality:

> "I have nothing in the world. I am as poor as when I lived here.
>
> . . . .
>
> Never to part, my dearest Arthur; never any more until the last! I never was rich before, I never was proud before, I never was happy before, I am rich in being taken by you, I am proud in having been resigned by you, I am happy in being with you in this prison, as I should be happy in coming back to it with you, if it should be the will of God, and comforting and serving you with all my love and truth." (LD, p. 817)

Little Dorrit's gift to Clennam, not only of her love, but of her truth, is significant. In her innocence she has embodied the truth which the world, caught up in the deceptions and illusions which are characteristic of evil, has tried to reject. For Dickens, as for Spenser, innocence and truth are synonymous.

Ultimately, the whole significance of Little Dorrit's theme of redemption is summed up in the great confrontation[42] between Amy and Mrs. Clennam, which precedes the union of the lovers. Mrs. Clennam justifies her past actions by articulating her Old Testament creed of wrath and vengence:

> "I have done," said Mrs. Clennam, "what it was given to me to do. I have set myself against evil; not against good. I have been an instrument of severity against sin. Have not mere sinners like myself been commissioned to lay it low in all time?"
>
> "In all time?" repeated Little Dorrit.

> "Even if my own wrong had prevailed with me, and my own vengeance had moved me, could I have found no justification? None in the old days when the innocent perished with the guilty, a thousand to one? When the wrath of the hater of the unrighteous was not slaked even in blood, and yet found favour?" (LD, p. 792)

Little Dorrit counters with her New Testament ethic of love and forgiveness:

> "O, Mrs. Clennam, Mrs. Clennam," said Little Dorrit, "angry feelings and unforgiving deeds are no comfort and no guide to you and me. My life has been passed in this poor prison, and my teaching has been very defective; but, let me implore you to remember later and better days. Be guided only by the healer of the sick, the raiser of the dead, the friend of all who were afflicted and forlorn, the patient Master who shed tears of compassion for our infirmities. We cannot but be right if we put all the rest away, and do everything in remembrance of Him. There is no vengeance and no infliction of suffering in His life, I am sure. There can be no confusion in following Him, and seeking for no other footsteps, I am certain!"
>
> In the softened light of the window, looking from the scene of her early trials to the shining sky, she was not in stronger opposition to the black figure in the shade, than the life and doctrine on which she rested were to that figure's history. It bent its head low again, and said not a word. (LD, p. 792)

The Victorian piety of Little Dorrit's sermonette may be a little difficult for modern readers to swallow; the power of a gospel of forgiveness to redeem a world which has become a debtor's prison is much more powerfully expressed in the symbolic vision of the city which immediately follows her speech:

7

> As they crossed the bridge, the clear steeples of the many churches looked as if they had advanced out of the murk that usually enshrouded them and come much nearer. The smoke that rose into the sky had lost its dingy hue and taken a brightness upon it. The beauties of the sunset had not faded from the long light films of cloud that lay at peace in the horizon. From a radiant centre over the whole length and breadth of the tranquil firmament, great shoots of light streamed among the early stars, like signs of the blessed later covenant of peace and hope that changed the crown of thorns into a glory. (LD, p. 793)

The most obvious element in this description, of course, is the light which picks up and repeats the imagery associated with the figure of

Little Dorrit in her encounter with the black and shadowed presence of Mrs. Clennam. The city had been presented earlier as a place of grim darkness and heavy skies, "melancholy streets" clad "in a penitential garb of soot" (LD, p. 28), streets which in the vicinity of the Marshalsea seemed like deep trenches (LD, p. 245). In this description one moves up from darkness and confinement to light and spaciousness; nor is the brightness of the light the blazing, lurid illumination which glared down upon Marseilles at the opening of the novel, sending destructive, white-hot shafts down upon the citizens. Instead, the "great shoots of light" shine peacefully across a "tranquil firmament." One notices too, that the churches, earlier depicted as obscured by darkness or cloud, are here represented as "emerging from the murk that usually enshrouded them." Finally, the suggestion of a redemption won through an acceptance rather than a rejection of the suffering which is an inevitable part of human existence is expressed by the image of the promised transfiguration of the crown of thorns into a crown of glory.

It is in the midst of this scene of regeneration and renewal that Mrs. Clennam's house collapses in ruins, and she herself falls to the ground, mute and paralyzed:

> In one swift instant, the old house was before them, with the man lying smoking in the window; another thundering sound, and it heaved, surged outward, opened asunder in fifty places, collapsed and fell. Deafened by the noise, stifled, choked, and blinded by the dust, they hid their faces and stood rooted to the spot. The dust storm, driven between them and the placid sky, parted for a moment and showed them the stars. As they looked up, wildly crying for help, the great pile of chimneys which was then alone left standing, like a tower in a whirlwind, rocked, broke, and hailed itself down upon the heap of ruin, as if every tumbling fragment were intent on burying the crushed wretch deeper. (LD, pp. 793-94)

The sequence of events which begins with Little Dorrit's meeting with Mrs. Clennam not only symbolizes the redemptive effect of the creed Amy personifies, but its ultimate triumph as well over the ancient code of retribution and wrath embraced by Mrs. Clennam. Dickens's description of the collapse of the house makes the event sound like a miniature apocalypse. Little Dorrit and her companion "hide their faces" in terror, then look up to heaven, "wildly crying for help," while the dust, which is the ancient symbol of man's mortality, swirls about them in great, choking clouds. Little Dorrit, although terrified, is unharmed by the event, but Mrs. Clennam, like her, "blackened by flying particles of rubbish" is metaphorically turned to stone:

> Mrs. Clennam dropped upon the stones; and she never from that hour moved so much as a finger again, or had the power to speak one word. For upwards of three years she reclined in her wheeled chair . . . and, except that she could move her eyes and faintly express a negative and affirmative with her head, she lived and died a statue. (LD, p. 794)

Earlier in the novel, Dickens had described Mrs. Clennam's arrogance as "an impious tower of stone she had built up to scale heaven" (LD, p. 47); in the collapse of the chimneys of her house, which crash to the ground like "a tower in a whirlwind" one sees the symbolic overthrow of her pride. The annhilation of her whole false structure of belief is expressed in the ruin of her house, and significantly, as it tumbles into dust, the devil who inhabits it is crushed as well.

In many of Dickens's early novels, the happy ending depicts the hero's or heroine's escape into an uncorrupted retreat. Pickwick retires to enjoy the sunny vistas of Dulwich; Oliver goes off to the country to live with the Maylies; Little Nell goes to heaven; Florence and her father retreat to the seaside, and David Copperfield symbolically recovers mother and the garden by marrying Agnes. In Bleak House, however, this characteristically Dickensian ending is blurred by ambiguity, and in Little Dorrit, it does not appear at all. The last paragraphs of the novel, among the most beautiful that Dickens ever wrote, depict Amy and Arthur's serene descent into the city streets:

> And they were married, with the sun shining on them through the painted figure of our Saviour on the window.
>
> . . . .
>
> . . . and Little Dorrit and her husband walked out of the church alone. They paused for a moment on the steps of the portico, looking at the fresh perspective of the street in the autumn morning sun's bright rays, and then went down.
>
> Went down into a modest life of usefulness and happiness. Went down to give a mother's care, in the fulness of time, to Fanny's neglected children no less than to their own . . . Went down to give a tender nurse and friend to Tip . . . They went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar. (LD, pp. 825-26)

The impulse to retreat is, as I have argued, a strong element in much of Dickens's work up to this point, but the rejection of that impulse, so strongly expressed here in the reiterated "went down" is foreshadowed to a considerable extent in those same early novels. Nell, for example, is permitted to escape and go to heaven, but Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness achieve a kind of redemption within this world, while Martin Chuzzlewit, after his long and fruitless search for Eden, discovers that his fulfillment lies in a return to the City. The ending of Little Dorrit is important, not because it represents a new departure for Dickens, but because it provides the most clearly and fully developed instance of this theme. Redemption in this novel takes place within, not beyond, a world clearly recognized as fallen and accepted as such. It is a personal and individual salvation[43] which each man must come to perceive for himself, and it is achieved through love and unselfconscious compassion. Amy and Arthur, in their wedding, are temporarily lifted up beyond the fallen world to stand in the sunlight which streams through the image of Christ, but then, like the Red Cross Knight after his vision of the New Jerusalem,[44] they must re-enter that world to continue the work of redemption within it. Liberation from man's prison is achieved, not through flight, but through a changed perception ("looking at the fresh perspective of the street in the autumn morning sun's bright rays") that recognizes, as Adam does at the end of Paradise Lost "we need not fear / To pass commodiously this life."[45]

CHAPTER V

THE LATE NOVELS: "FALLEN LATITUDES"

When the last installment of Little Dorrit appeared in June, 1857, Dickens still had thirteen more years to live and three major novels to write. These late works, however, are markedly different from Little Dorrit in that in them a basic shift in perspective has taken place. The novels up to and including Little Dorrit, in so far as they are concerned with defining the nature of innocence and the demonic, may be said to view the world from what, for want of a better term, one might describe as a religious or theological perspective. By that I mean that the primary impulse behind them seems to be a need to define the nature of good and evil in transcendental terms. The novels which succeed Little Dorrit, by contrast, exhibit a movement away from specifically religious or theological concerns as the transcendental vision is replaced by one which is more social and empirical in nature. These later novels continue to employ imagery which suggests the familiar contest between innocence and the demonic, but the essential conflict is most often more clearly between life and death.

Philip Collins argues that the late novels are remarkable precisely for the prominence of religious imagery in them.[1] He sees in works like A Tale of Two Cities, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend "a quickening concern with personal salvation"[2] and decries "the move towards a transcendental world"[3] as one which does not "constitute a very productive literary achievement."[4] In his emphasis on personal salvation, however, Dickens, I submit, clearly rejects "the move towards a transcendental view." Whatever redemption or liberation his heroes achieve within the late novels is firmly realized within the here and now.

Some indication of the extent to which Dickens has abandoned the theological perspective or transcendental view can be detected in his portraits of devil-like figures in the late novels. A theological view of evil must ultimately acknowledge it as inexplicable. As Milton shows us in Paradise Lost, while the essence of Satan's being lies in his primary act of disobedience, the disobedience itself is not and cannot be explained. It simply is. In that sense, evil is finally mysterious and terrifying; hence, demonic. All of Dickens's early devils, whether patterned after Satan, Beelzebub, Mephistopheles or any other traditional devil figure, are essentially demonic in that their ultimate motives remain, like Iago's, shrouded in obscurity. True, Dickens sometimes makes an attempt to supply motivation: Oliver's brother employs Fagin to corrupt the child, Quilp is sexually attracted to Nell, Sir John Chester is jealous of Haredale, Carker resents Mr. Dombey's airs of superiority; but in every case the passionate energy which the devil brings to his task seems disproportionate to its supposed "cause."

Although figures with some superficially demonic attributes continue to appear in Dickens's late novels (this is most true, perhaps, of A Tale of Two Cities), close analysis reveals that these "devils," appearances notwithstanding, are not truly demonic in any real sense. Their actions are shown, in every case, to be perfectly explicable in empirical terms. Monseigneur and the Marquis are representative of their class and are the product of social forces. Orlick, the least devil-like of all Dickens's later villains, represents something nasty and brutish in human nature rather than some infernal reality. Bradley Headstone's insane fury is not the product of demonic energy but extreme repression, and John Jasper has taken to "carving devils out of his own heart" to offset his paralyzing sense of ennui.

A Tale of Two Cities

A Tale of Two Cities has long been a problem for critics. Although it enjoys great popularity, especially, as Edgar Johnson has remarked, among readers who do not much care for Dickens's other works,[5] serious students of Dickens have seen it as flawed, weak, uncharacteristic,[6] most of all as ambiguous.[7] One of the main reasons, I would argue, for the difficulty we encounter in trying to analyze A Tale of Two Cities is that it is a novel in which Dickens has tried to eat his cake and have it too. He tries to view the world of the novel from both a theological and a social and historical perspective, and the two visions get in the way of each other.[8] The most demonic of all the later Dickensian villains are contained in this novel in the persons of the Monseigneur and the Marquis d'Evrémonde; but they are not, from a theological point of view, really devils at all. Instead, they are allegorical figures who represent specific social and historical factors. The crowd, at its most furious, is depicted in imagery which similarly carries connotations of the demonic, but its members are not really devils either, as we shall see. We have a Little Nell-like innocent in Lucie Manette, but even when compared with Little Nell (we shall say nothing for the moment of Little Dorrit), she is curiously passive and ineffective, in part because her kind of innocence belongs to the dream-world of Arcadian gardens and demonic villains. When a character like Little Nell is transferred out of the dreamy world of The Old Curiosity Shop and set down in the midst of the historical arena of the French Revolution, she becomes simply incredible. Finally, in the death of Sidney Carton, with its trappings, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" and, "it is a far, far better thing," we are presented with an event that is intended, I would assume, to signify redemption. But, as I shall shortly argue in more detail, it is an unconvincing sacrifice, an expression of despair rather than redemptive, sacrificial love, a despair which springs in part from a recognition that Arcadia has vanished, that the flawed, corrupt world of the here and now is all we have. Later Dickens's protagonists can accept this fact, as well as the responsibility that goes with it. They do not evade responsibility by either dying or escaping into some pastoral and unfallen world, but in A Tale of Two Cities we have not yet come that far.

A Tale of Two Cities takes place in a world where death is an omnipresent reality.[9] From the opening chapter which describes Fate and Death preparing for the terrible harvest in France while in England highwayman and hangman greedily exact their toll, to the final chapter set at the foot of the guillotine, the novel is permeated with references and allusions to death. These are primarily of two kinds. In a duality which reminds one to a considerable extent of The Old Curiosity Shop, actual life is frequently presented in terms which suggest the darkness, isolation, corruption, confinement and silence of the grave, while literal death, on the other hand, is often pictured as the ultimate release and refuge from "the storm called Life" (TTC, p. 45).

The identification between physical existence and death is made insistently throughout the novel. It is suggested very powerfully in the narrator's description of Mr. Lorry's coach journey to Dover through a cold, autumnal landscape. His errand is to effect Dr. Manette's "recall to life," but Dickens's description of the coach and its passengers would seem to indicate that the world of the living to which the Doctor is to be recalled is not significantly different from the grave he has left. The coach, in a description which reminds one of the opening of Bleak House, labours up Shooter's Hill through thick mud, surrounded by "a clammy and intensely cold mist" which "shuts out everything from the light of the coach-lamps." Inside, the passengers sit muffled "to the cheek bones" in a "mildewy" atmosphere that evokes the grave. Shrinking from each other in mutual mistrust and suspicion, "hidden under almost as many wrappers from the eyes of the mind, as from the eyes of the body" (TTC, p. 5), they are as spiritually isolated from each other as ever Dr. Manette was in the Bastille. Later, the narrator makes an explicit connection between the spiritual isolation which characterizes the passengers, and which he sees as an aspect of the human condition, and death itself:

> A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other. . . . Something of the awfulness, even of Death itself, is referable to this. . . . In any of the burial places of this city through which I pass, is there a sleeper more inscrutable than its busy inhabitants are, in their innermost personality, to me, or than I am to them? (TTC, p. 10)

When the isolation is linked with literal imprisonment, the paradox of life in death emerges very strongly. Dr. Manette, after his imprisonment in the Bastille, looks like an exhumed corpse, and the prisoners of La Force are described by Charles Darnay as "a company of the dead. Ghosts all" (TTC, p. 242). Actual prisoners, however, are not the only ones to experience existence as death. Sidney Carton tells Lucie that he is best regarded as "one who died young" (TTC, p. 143), and over and over again, even apparently inconsequential imagery reiterates the motif of life overwhelmed by death. The candles on the table at the Dover Inn are "gloomily reflected on every leaf; as if *they* were buried, in deep graves of black mahogany" (TTC, p. 18). The decaying corpse of Evrémonde's assassin is suspended from a gallows over the village well:

> "He is hanged there forty feet high--and is left hanging, poisoning the water. . . ."
>
> "It is frightful, messieurs. How can the women and the children draw water! Who can gossip of an evening, under that shadow! Under it, have I said? When I left the village, Monday evening as the sun was going to bed, and looked back from the hill, the shadow struck across the church, across the mill, across the prison--seemed to strike across the earth, messieurs, to where the sky rests upon it!" (TTC, p. 164)

The image of the corpse whose looming presence poisons the very water and oppresses the heart of the women and children, whose shadow seems not only to lour across the entire village, but also across the whole earth, dramatically suggests the novel's theme of existence under the shadow of death.

Even more telling is the description of the staircase leading up to the room where the newly-released Dr. Manette is concealed:

> Mr. Lorry's spirits grew heavier and heavier, as he and his two companions ascended higher and higher.
>
> . . . Every little habitation . . . left its own heap of

> refuse on its own landing . . . The uncontrollable and hopeless mass of decomposition so engendered, would have polluted the air, even if poverty and deprivation had not loaded it with their intangible impurities . . . Through such an atmosphere, by a steep dark shaft of dirt and poison, the way led. (TTC, p. 34)

At the end of their climb they encounter Manette. White-haired, hollow-faced, with transparent hands and a voice like "the last feeble echo of a sound made long and long ago" (TTC, p. 38), dressed in faded yellow rags that look like the remnants of a shroud, his is the corpse to which this graveshaft leads. But the shaft leads up, not down as one would expect, and the corpse is not only alive, he is supposed to have been "recalled to life." The passage provides further evidence of the reversal of the traditional relation between life and death which this novel presents. As one moves up from what one would normally identify as the level of the grave to the life above it, the stench of death increases.

In A Tale of Two Cities then, as in The Old Curiosity Shop, actual existence is experienced as if it were death. France or England, city or country, winter or summer, all belong to the realm of death. London in the summer is "a lifeless desert" with "wreaths of dust . . . spinning round and round before the morning blast, as if the desert-sand had risen far away, and the first spray of it in its advance had begun to overwhelm the city" (TTC, p. 85). The French countryside is a wasteland:

> Far and wide lay a ruined country, yielding nothing but desolation. Every green leaf, every blade of grass ~~and~~ blade of grain, was as shrivelled and poor as the miserable people. Everything was bowed down, dejected, oppressed and broken. Habitations, fences, domesticated animals, men, women, children, and the soil that bore them--all worn out. (TTC, p. 216)

This is a world where the guillotine replaces the cross as "the sign of the regeneration of the human race" (TTC, p. 260), the world where "it seemed as if Creation were delivered over to Death's dominion" (TTC, p. 299).

In this novel of death in life, the "Arcadian impulse,"[10] as Auden defines it, which Dickens had successfully resisted in Little Dorrit, re-emerges. At the conclusion of that novel, as one will recall, Amy and Arthur descend into the roaring street; not for them the blissful garden-world that awaited David and Agnes, or even, with some ambiguity, Esther and Allan. It is true that A Tale of Two Cities contains no pastoral refuges in the usual sense of some paradisal spot tucked away in a corner of the countryside, except perhaps for the dusty little court-yard in London where Lucie receives her suitors in the shadow of the plane tree.[11] Instead, as in The Old Curiosity Shop, the Arcadian dream is transferred from actual earthly gardens to death itself. In death, as in the earlier gardens, can be found safety, peace, refuge from "the storm called Life." In The Old Curiosity Shop, however, Little Nell had to die because no place on earth was sufficiently untainted to receive her radiantly innocent soul. In A Tale of Two Cities Sidney Carton is drawn to "the loadstone rock" by a sense of despair at the futility of his existence.

Although the narrator, with his insistent repetition of "I am the Resurrection and the Life," appears to want us to see Carton's death both as a noble act of self-sacrifice and as an affirmation of the Christian belief in life beyond the grave, the rest of the novel makes it obvious that Carton, by dying, is not giving up anything he ever valued very much.[12] His nihilistic outlook is apparent from the very beginning. Congratulating Darnay on his acquittal by an

English jury, he asks him how it feels to be restored "'to this terrestrial scheme'" once more, adding, "'As for me, the greatest desire I have, is to forget that I belong to it'" (TTC, p. 77). Like Eugene Wrayburn, he has an air of devil-may-care recklessness which masks a profound despair. Moved to confide in Lucie, he tells her, "'I shall never be better than I am, I shall sink lower, and be worse'" (TTC, p. 143). As he prepares to take Darnay's place in the condemned cell, his manner is that "of a tired man, who had wandered and struggled and got lost, but who at length struck into his road and saw its end" (TTC, p. 297). His face, in death, "they said . . . was the peacefullest man's face ever beheld" (TTC, p. 357). Peaceful, because he has achieved his desire to escape into a world where, as he tells the little seamstress, "there is no Time there, and no trouble" (TTC, p. 357).

Carton's (and Dickens's) fascination with death in this novel is, I believe, a direct outcome of the recognition contained in Little Dorrit that a fallen world offers no innocent refuges in this life. Death's appeal as an escape from the sufferings and strains of ordinary existence is, of course, an element in much of Dickens's work, both early and late. But in the early novels (excluding The Old Curiosity Shop) Dickens conceals the real nature of the reward his protagonists enjoy at the conclusion of all their trials by presenting it as an actual garden. The growing pessimism which one sees reflected in Bleak House and Little Dorrit, however, is reflected in the vision of a universally fallen world from which there are no escape hatches. With the recognition that a return to Eden is impossible, the fascination with death as the only alternative to existence in a less than perfect here and now emerges forcefully. As the narrator remarks in A Tale of Two Cities:

> In seasons of pestilence, some of us will have a secret attraction to the disease--a terrible passing inclination to die of it. (TTC, p. 268)

Philip Hobsbaum has described A Tale of Two Cities as "a regression,"[13] and to the extent that the novel appears to evoke the world of The Old Curiosity Shop the statement is true. What I characterized in my discussion of that novel as "the half-in-love-with-easeful-death syndrome" is not, however, the only aspect of A Tale of Two Cities to suggest the earlier novel. The presentation of Lucie Manette as a kind of innocent seems to me to owe much more to the portrait of Little Nell than the influence of Little Dorrit. Lucie is clearly intended to be seen as an innocent, and just as clearly intended to fulfill, like Flo Dombey and Little Dorrit herself, some sort of redemptive role. In a novel in which darkness is one of the characteristics of the death-like world, her name, Lucie, is no doubt significant. Her appeals call forth the healing tears which, like Dombey's, are intended to be seen as a sign of her father's restoration to life[14] (TTC, p. 45), and it is her beauty and purity which inspire Carton to what is supposed to be the one meaningful act of his life. In spite of all this, however, and in spite of the narrator's repeated insistence on the adjective "innocent" in his descriptions of Lucie, she is simply too vaguely realized to be seen in any effective redemptive role. As Edgar Johnson comments, Lucie is "hardly more . . . than a pretty ingénue";[15] as George Wing remarks, another in the long line of beautiful but characterless young women that stretches back to Arabella Allen.[16] Even more damagingly, she is characterized in large measure by a passivity and helplessness which are the antithesis of Little Dorrit's wise competençe. Jeremy Cruncher complains bitterly of his wife's "floppings": the reader might well complain of something similar in Lucie. Her response at every critical turn seems to involve a fainting fit. Told of Dr. Manette's real identity, she falls into a state that looks more like sudden death than an ordinary swoon:

> Perfectly still and silent, and not even fallen back in her chair, she sat under his hand, utterly insensible; with her eyes open and fixed upon him, and with that last expression looking as if it were carved or branded into her forehead. (TTC, p. 24)

She collapses during Darnay's treason trial and has to be helped out of the courtroom (TTC, p. 71), and again when her husband is taken by the revolutionary tribunal. After hearing her father's letter read in court, "she turned, laid her head lovingly on her father's breast, tried to speak to him, and fell at his feet" (TTC, p. 318). As Cruncher observes in another context, "'Bust me, if she ain't at it agin!'" (TTC, p. 51).

Lucie's swoons are not only a sign of her helplessness, but are also, perhaps, a partial explanation for Carton's attraction to her. The ease and frequency with which she slips out of this world into insensibility suggests that she has more to do with death than life. It is also perhaps of some significance that our final glimpse of her in the novel reveals "her and her husband, lying side by side in their last earthly bed" (TTC, p. 358).

Dickens's characterization of Lucie as an innocent, however feebly presented, and his portrait of Sidney Carton as a man who longs to escape from both a world and a self he sees as hopelessly marred, are evidence of what I have called Dickens's theological perspective in this novel. When we come to examine the villains of the piece, however, we find a shift to a more secular outlook. These villains are depicted with a certain amount of demonic imagery, but as I mentioned earlier, when one examines them closely, the demonic aura evaporates.

This point emerges more clearly if we compare the devils of _A Tale of Two Cities_ with their counterparts in _Barnaby Rudge_. The two novels are alike in a number of respects: both are historical novels; both depict societies in the grip of social turmoil; both are justly famous for their powerful scenes of mob violence. _Barnaby Rudge_ makes some attempt to explain the Gordon Riots as the consequence of bad government and worse law, a point which emerges most clearly in the carefully constructed parallels between the England of George III and its microcosm, the Maypole Inn with its sleepy, stupid and tyrannical landlord. In one's recollection of the novel, however, the scenes that tend to stand out most vividly are those which concentrate on the demonic and largely senseless fury of a mob that has been deliberately whipped up to orgiastic pitch by an even more unmotivated and obviously demonic villain, the satanic Mr. Gashford. The scenes of revolutionary violence in _A Tale of Two Cities_ are no less dramatic in their intensity, but the narrator is at great pains to stress the fact that the revolutionaries, for all their irrationality and destructiveness, are not devils but ordinary human beings capable of affection, tenderness, love. After slaughtering Foulon and his son-in-law and mounting their heads on pikes, the crowd disperses:

> Gradually, these strings of ragged people shortened and frayed away; and then poor lights began to shine in high windows, and slender fires were made in the streets, at which neighbours cooked in common, afterwards supping at their doors.
>
> Scanty and sufficient suppers, those, and innocent of meat, as of most other sauce to wretched bread. Yet, human fellowship infused some nourishment into the flinty viands, and struck some sparks of cheerfulness out of them. Fathers and mothers who had had their full share in the worst of the day, played gently with their meagre children; and lovers, with such a world around them and before them, loved and hoped. (TTC, p. 215)

Their passionate rage and blood-thirstiness is not the expression of a demonic love of violence for its own sake, as it is in Barnaby Rudge; it is instead the inevitable reaction of an oppressed people driven beyond endurance:

> Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. Sow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind. (TCC, p. 353)

In Barnaby Rudge the rioters are dupes of the devil-figure, Gashford, who, with purposeless malevolence, exults in evil for its own sake. In A Tale of Two Cities Dickens is so much concerned to show the revolution as a spontaneous and historically inevitable outburst that he does not permit us to see any leaders other than those produced from among the people themselves. Defarge and his wife are both bloodthirsty, vengeful and pitiless (this is especially true of Madame Defarge), but their conduct requires no explanation in demonic terms to account for it. They are neither of them a willing servant of evil; their intention, however tragically mistaken, is to serve a cause they perceive as just. Defarge's moral outburst on behalf of Dr. Manette is evidence of a potentially noble passion for justice that has been twisted by the terrible conditions under which he lives into an implacable obsession with revenge. Defarge is much more humane than his wife, as his strong misgivings over her scheme to deliver Lucie and her little daughter up to the Terror testify, but even she, with all her eagerness to unleash "the tiger and the devil" cannot properly be seen as demonic. Although Miss Pross says the Frenchwoman might be, from her appearance, "the wife of Lucifer" (TTC, p. 348), Madame Defarge, with her knitted register of men's names and deeds, is much more clearly seen as one of the Fates,[17] calling down upon an unjust society the retribution its own deeds have called into being.

The clearest suggestion of the demonic in the novel clings to the figures of Monseigneur and Darnay's uncle, the Marquis d'Evrémonde. Monseigneur in particular is positively satanic in his "god-like imitated state."[18] As he daintily sips his chocolate, he seems, even in that simple act, to proclaim that "the earth and the fulness thereof are mine" (TCC, p. 99). Crowds of worshippers await his emergence from his "sanctuary of sanctuaries, his Holiest of Holiests" (TCC, p. 98) as if anticipating a divine visitation. When he finally makes his appearance--"what submission, what cringing and fawning, what servility, what abject humilation! As to bowing down in body and spirit, nothing in that way was left for Heaven" (TCC, p. 102). Monseigneur has a diabolical magnificence in his parody of the Godhead which it is beyond the power of a seedy devil like Rigaud to muster, but the similarity between the two is suggested by Monseigneur's Rigaud-like ability to infect his worshippers with "the leprosy of unreality" (TTC, p. 100). Faceless, nameless, not one individual but many, he is the symbolic embodiment of the values which the rulers of France have self-destructively maintained, and in that regard his role is exactly the same as Rigaud's in Little Dorrit. He represents evil, not as some external principle, but as something generated within and by society itself.

The Marquis d'Evrémonde is one of Monseigneur's courtiers, and is presented in similarly demonic terms. With his pale, haughty face, as expressionless as a fine mask (TTC, p. 102), he pads silently through his splendid apartments like "a refined tiger . . . an enchanted marquis of the impenitently wicked sort" (TTC, p. 119). In his mannered elegance he recalls Sir John Chester to some extent, but the Marquis is clearly intended to be seen as representative of his class, while Chester, as Thurley[19] points out, represents nobody but himself. The Marquis is used by Dickens to symbolize not only his class,[20] but the causes and effects of the Revolution as well. It is his past outrages against the family of Madame Defarge that have called her destructive energies into being, and his responsibility as one of the rulers of France for what ultimately takes place is suggested by the link between the image of his well-bred tiger's face and the tiger and the devil Madame Defarge longs to let loose. The oceans of blood which are set flowing during the Terror are also anticipated in the crimson shadows which fall across the Marquis and his chateau (TTC, pp. 102, 107). The Marquis is monstrously cruel and wicked, but he is no more a devil than are the Defarges. There is nothing mysterious about either the Marquis or his motives. He is moved by simple class interest and arrogance. Indeed, there is almost a kind of lunatic gallantry in his avowed determination to "'die, perpetuating the system under which [he has] lived'" (TTC, p. 117).

Although both the Marquis and the Monseigneur may seem, in their aristocratic hauteur, to have more in common with the courtly devil of Barnaby Rudge, Sir John Chester, than with Rigaud, the shabby devil of Little Dorrit, they are, like Rigaud, dramatic emblems of an evil which has been generated within society itself. The cataclysm of the Revolution is not some sudden and inexplicable attack launched against an innocent people, but the inevitable result of years of oppression, injustice and exploitation:

> It was too much the way of Monseigneur under his reverses as a refugee, and it was too much the way of native British orthodoxy, to talk of this terrible Revolution as if it were the only harvest ever known under the skies that had not been sown--as if nothing had ever been done, or omitted to be done, that had led to it--as if observers of the wretched millions in France, and of the misused and perverted resources that should have made them prosperous, had not seen it inevitably coming, years before, and had not in plain words recorded what they saw. (TTC, p. 226)

France is no Oliver or Nell, the undeserving and innocent victim of evil's inexplicable designs, but is instead, like the England of Bleak House, a nation reaping the harvest it has itself sown.

A Tale of Two Cities is a novel which strains in two directions at once. The portraits of Lucie and Carton suggest Dickens's longing to sort out and identify good and evil, to find some alternative to life within a morally ambiguous and drastically flawed universe, while another part of him recognizes that in human communities, good and evil rarely exist in a pure or unmixed state and that the individual within society must assume his share of responsibility for the world's misery. Aside from Lucie, the novel's only innocent, we find no character in A Tale of Two Cities who is not in some way involved with evil and therefore, however inadvertently, guilty.[21] The people of France have been most cruelly victimized, but their response, however understandable, is wicked and destructive. The aristocracy, once the

Revolution has taken place, are viewed with great sympathy, but we are never allowed to forget that they wove their own fate. Charles Darnay is an honourable and decent man, but he is the son of a monstrous family, and as such, the inheritor of an ancestral guilt and responsibility from which he cannot escape. Manette loves his daughter and desires only her happiness. Nevertheless, it is his letter denouncing the Evrémondes which leads to Darnay's condemnation by the revolutionary tribunal. Miss Pross is a tender and loving guardian to Lucie; she is also the equally tender and loving sister of the paid informer and spy, Barsad. Even poor Mrs. Cruncher, for all her piety, is forced to eat the bread earned by her husband's ghoulish activities. The representatives of goodness in the novel are connected, willy-nilly, by blood, circumstance and human affection with those who represent evil.

The tension between the longing, on the one hand, to present a morally clear-cut conflict between good and evil, and the recognition of moral ambiguities, is responsible, finally, for the doubling of the the novel's hero. Carton and Darnay, as most readers have long recognized,[22] are really two sides of the same character. Dickens resolves the conflict between his desire to grant his hero the same kind of paradisal reward that he permitted the protagonists of all his early novels, and his realization that this sort of escape is really a denial of responsibility, by letting the Carton half of the hero enter into his heavenly reward, while the Darnay half remains on earth to make atonement through work.[23]

The most significant change in Dickens's outlook between his earlier and later work is the gradual disappearance of his need to account for evil as something external to human nature. Beginning with Bleak House, and most clearly in Little Dorrit, he moves to a position where he both accepts and assimilates the notion that man is, by nature, a flawed and imperfect being who must assume responsibility for the suffering that surrounds him. He cannot blame it on the devil; nor can he escape from its reality. (The fact that Sidney Carton does just that is what makes the ending of A Tale of Two Cities so unsatisfactory.) After A Tale of Two Cities, no hero is permitted that escape. Pip and Eugene Wrayburn, like Arthur Clennam, discover that their destiny lies within society and responsible work.

All of the novels after A Tale of Two Cities take place in a world whose fallen nature is simply taken for granted. One indication of this is the similarity of the setting in which each novel opens. The narrator of A Tale of Two Cities speaks of "these days when it is mostly winter in fallen latitudes" (TTC, p. 123), and the wintry climate of these latitudes appears repeatedly in the opening chapters of the late novels. A Tale of Two Cities itself begins with a coach journey "on a Friday night late in November" (TTC, p. 4), while Great Expectations opens with Pip's visit to the graveyard on "a memorable raw afternoon" (GE, p. 1) just before Christmas. In Our Mutual Friend we find Gaffer Hexam fishing for corpses in the filthy river as "an autumn evening was closing in" (OMF, p. 1), and Edwin Drood, after its phantasmagoric opening chapter, repeats the same general atmosphere of dusk, cold and damp that are characteristic of the initial settings of the other three novels:[24]

> Not only is the day waning, but the year. The low sun is fiery and yet cold behind the monastery ruin . . . . There has been rain this afternoon, and a wintry shudder goes among the little

> pools on the cracked, uneven flag-stones, and through the giant elm-trees as they shed a gust of tears. (ED, p. 5)

Once Dickens has stopped trying to deny the universality of the fall, he does not need devils, in the sense of mysterious and essentially unaccountable personifications, to explain the problem of suffering. There is no longer any need to search for a cause for evil outside the human condition itself. I have already traced the course of Dickens's obsession with accounting for evil through Pickwick Papers to its resolution in Little Dorrit. Before finally concluding my arguments I shall examine each of the last three novels in turn with a view to showing that the apparent "devils" of these works are not really demonic in the sense that the earlier devils were.

Great Expectations

If A Tale of Two Cities suggests a partial return to the worlds of The Old Curiosity Shop and Barnaby Rudge, Great Expectations is in some ways a reprise of David Copperfield[25] in its emphasis on the importance of the hero's childhood in the formation of his adult personality. Where David Copperfield, however, focusses on David's quest for identity, Great Expectations concentrates on the theme of human guilt.[26] The action of the novel confines itself to this world, and the whole work is informed by a powerful social vision which lays bare the acquisitiveness, materialism and competitiveness of mid-Victorian society. There are no unfallen gardens in this world, at least not for the hero, and no real devils. There is one apparent innocent in the novel, but he is not the hero, and the hero's ultimate regeneration focusses less on absolution from guilt than on acceptance of it. Underlying the whole work is the vision of a universally guilty humanity struggling to deny that guilt and achieve a state of "innocence" which can only be described as spurious.

The burden of guilt is one which Pip bears almost from his first moment of conscious awareness.[27] David Copperfield opens with a description of David's idyllic childhood in the locked garden-world of the Rookery. If Pip, however, ever enjoyed even as brief a period of innocence as David, we are certainly never permitted to see it. The novel begins with the child coming to his "first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things" in a world which is the antithesis of David's, a hostile wilderness, the anti-garden:

> At such a time I found out for certain, that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip. (GE, p. 1)

Suddenly, all the menace implicit in the landscape seems to gather itself together in the figure of the convict who terrifies the child with nightmarish threats, then leaves him to a world dominated by the gibbet, the ancient unlit beacon,[28] and a sky barred by angry red and black lines.

The image of the prison, suggested by the barred sky, and the references to the convict and the gibbet, the cold, wintry atmosphere (the time is early evening in late December), the weeds, the graves, the savage and hostile nature surrounding the child, all suggest a world very remote from David's sunny garden of innocence. Nor is the child, whose first conscious emotion is a fear that later increases to terror, an innocent. One must of course be very careful here; Dickens never espoused the doctrine of infant depravity, the position which holds, with the Murdstones, that all children are "little vipers," consciously sinful beings in dire need of redemption. But neither does Dickens, much beyond his early period, continue to embrace the romantic view that children are innately innocent. The Dickens of Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop does, but one has only to compare Pip and Oliver to see the change. Oliver too finds himself inhabiting a savage and wintry world. He is surrounded by thieves, sadists, and would-be corrupters and exploiters of innocence. Try as they might, however, they cannot corrupt Oliver because he is inherently incapable of sin. He cannot steal, he cannot tell a lie, however great the temptation. This is certainly not the case with Pip. He steals, and he knows that he is stealing; he lies, and is dismally aware that he is doing so. There are a great many extenuating circumstances surrounding these acts: Pip is only a child; accustomed to being intimidated and abused by adults, he is peculiarly vulnerable to Magwitch's threats. Oliver, however, has been even more brutally and systematically mistreated than Pip, but unlike Pip, he heroically resists temptation even when his life is in real and immediate danger--which Pip's is not. There is no question, though, about which child the reader responds to more sympathetically. Oliver is really some sort of angelic, unfallen being disguised as a human child. We identify much more strongly with young Pip because his terrified acquiescence in acts he knows are supposed to be wrong is a much more believable and human response than Oliver's saintly resistance. To identify this response as fallen is simply to use a convenient and traditional term to describe that element in human psychology which makes most of us choose self-preservation over self-sacrifice, self-interest over selflessness, the same tendency which the framers of the Thirty-Nine Articles had in mind when they described original sin, not as a conscious and deliberate wickedness, but as that by which man "is of his own nature inclined to evil."[29]

To argue, then, that Dickens opens Great Expectations with a vivid vignette of fallen man in a fallen world is not to imply that he has joined the camp of the Murdstones, Miss Barbary and Mrs. Clennam, but that his presentation in this novel of even childhood as a fallen estate is essential to the theme the work reiterates again and again--the universality of human guilt. There are almost no innocent children in Dickens's novels after Dombey and Son.[30] David Copperfield's "innocence" is fairly speedily exposed as mere childish egocentricity, and Jenny Wren in Our Mutual Friend displays in her marked streak of sadism a spirit as tragically warped as her body. The only other child in Great Expectations of any consequence is Estella,[31] who young as she is has faithfully absorbed the perverse values of her foster mother. Both young Pip and the child Estella are corrupted as a result of circumstances over which they, as children, have no control. Nevertheless, the fact that they can be corrupted at all indicates how far Dickens has travelled away from the worlds of Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop.

The concept of the fall, as suggested by the novel's opening image of the anti-garden, with all that emblem's traditional connotations, might suggest that Dickens is still working from an essentially theological perspective. I think, however, that it is more accurate to say that he evokes the concept because it provides a useful and familiar category for establishing at the outset the moral atmosphere which the novel will explore in depth. The world of Great Expectations is drastically flawed, but, as in A Tale of Two Cities, the explanation for its condition is primarily social and empirical. I am not attempting to imply here that Dickens is concerned to repudiate the idea of a fallen humanity, but rather that he is no longer much interested in explaining how or why; instead, he concentrates on showing us what kind of society such beings create.

The world of Great Expectations is one in which "innocence" has become an almost irrelevant concept. Everyone (with perhaps the conspicuous exception of Joe) as the trial scene (GE, p. 453) symbolically indicates, is guilty, and what each is guilty of is a self-centred denial of human brotherhood. The novel is very much the product of the 1860's in that echoes of Darwinism reverberate very strongly throughout it. Pip, contemplating the graves of his little brothers, imagines them to be creatures who had very early given up the "universal struggle" (GE, p. 1). Most of the characters in the novel tend to see themselves as isolated individuals engaged in a grim struggle for survival or, that achieved, for those things which will render their positions even more secure--wealth, status, and above all, power. As one individual competes with another in clawing his way up the ladder,[32] all emotions and relationships which are not practically useful to that end have to be jettisoned as so much excess baggage. One cannot afford, except under very special circumstances, such other-regarding responses as selfless love, genuine compassion, or disinterested friendship.[33] Only those relationships which can be used to further one's own selfish ends need be maintained. Mrs. Joe kowtows to her husband's patronizing but prosperous Uncle Pumblechook, while bitterly resenting her brother's necessary dependence on her. Pip himself learns to worship the corpse-like Miss Havisham and the icy Estella, while repudiating the only genuinely loving friend he has ever had. The opening chapter in which the child is bullied into obeying the stronger adult, who has himself been victimized by those who possess more power than he, pretty well sums up the dynamics of human relationships in the world of the novel.[34]

All the evil in Great Expectations, from mere social snobbery, to wife-beating and murder, is seen to spring from the same source: an inherent selfishness which tends to dissolve human bonds. In such a society, one has little need of a devil to explain the causes of human misery. Accordingly, Great Expectations has no devil-figures, not even, as in Little Dorrit or A Tale of Two Cities, as symbolic personifications of purely human evil. Evil *is* personified in the novel by one particular character, but he is no devil.[35] I am speaking, of course, of Orlick. In spite of a few attributes which might faintly suggest a link with traditional images of the demonic--his surname with its possibly veiled echo of Old Nick, the Christian name which the villagers find both a mystery and an "affront," and his attempts to terrorize young Pip by telling him "that the Devil lived in a black corner of the forge, and that he knew the fiend very well" (GE, p. 105)--he is largely presented in terms of imagery which indicates something primitive, rather than demonic:

> He was a broad-shouldered loose-limbed swarthy fellow of great strength, never in a hurry, and always slouching. . . . when he went to the Jolly Bargeman to eat his dinner, or went away at night, he would slouch out, like Cain or the Wandering Jew, as if he had no idea where he was going, and no intention of ever coming back. He lodged at a sluice-keeper's out on the marshes, and on working days would come slouching from his hermitage with his hands in his pockets and his dinner loosely tied in a bundle round his neck . . . He always slouched, locomotively, with his eyes on the ground; and, when accosted or otherwise required to raise them, he looked up in a half resentful, half puzzled way, as though the only thought he ever had, was that it was rather an odd and injurious fact that he should never be thinking. (GE, p. 105)

There are two strands of imagery intertwined in this description. The first and most obvious (perhaps reflecting contemporary interest in evolutionary theories of primitive man in its emphasis on Orlick's loose-limbed slouching posture, and his look of dull resentment), suggests a creature half-way between ape and man, a kind of missing link. The other, with its reference to Cain and the Wandering Jew, links the ape with unregenerate human nature. (Both Cain and the Wandering Jew are emblematic of guilt, rather than anything Satanic.) The two sets of images reinforce each other to create a powerful impression of Orlick's function as the embodiment of something clearly nasty and brutish, but not, I would repeat, of anything particularly demonic.

Orlick's role in the novel, as Julian Moynahan[36] has demonstrated, is very strongly and pointedly associated with Pip. His career runs in a shadow-parallel alongside Pip's, first at the forge, then with Miss Havisham, and later, in London. As Moynahan has noted, one of his primary functions is as an inadvertent instrument of punishment against some of those who have injured Pip, like Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook.[37] Moynahan also suggests that Bentley Drummle,[38] who strongly resembles Orlick both physically and temperamentally, is simply Orlick on a higher social level. It is Drummle, of course, who marries the haughty Estella, then beats her into submission.

Orlick represents the passionate and violent side of human nature which Pip, from a combination of timidity and bourgeois respectability, cannot bring himself to acknowledge. Pip is a child with ample cause for profound hostility and resentment, but we never really see him express any. He knows that he has been mistreated:

> I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent coercion, was unjust to me. I had cherished a profound conviction that her bringing me up by hand, gave her no right to bring me up by jerks. (GE, p. 58)

He knows too that he has been most cruelly used by Miss Havisham and Estella, but one never hears him utter a word of even the mildest protest, until his story is almost done. He is a little like Esther, in that the reader, in considering him, is driven to the conviction that Pip is deliberately repressing a good part of himself. The hidden self, whose existence he cannot consciously acknowledge, and which he denies in his longing for respectability, is terrifyingly reflected back to him by Orlick. This is the symbolic significance of the lime kiln scene in which Orlick mysteriously accuses Pip of crimes he has himself committed:

> "Wolf!" said he, folding his arms again, "Old Orlick's a going to tell you somethink. It was you as did for your shrew sister."
>
> . . . .
>
> "It was you, villain," said I.

> "I tell you it was your doing--I tell you it was done through you . . . I come upon her from behind, as I come upon you tonight. I giv' it her! I left her for dead, and if there had been a lime kiln as nigh her as there is now nigh you, she shouldn't have come to life again. But it warn't Old Orlick as did it; it was you. You was favoured, and he was bullied and beat. Old Orlick bullied and beat, eh? Now you pays for it. You done it; now you pays for it." (GE, p. 405)

The literal basis for Orlick's accusation rests upon the fact that Pip unintentionally supplied the weapon for the assault upon his sister: "It was done through you." Of more importance, however, is the subsequent charge: "you was favoured; I was bullied and beat." Pip's life with Mrs. Joe could hardly be described as "favoured," and it was Pip, of course, not Orlick, who was "bullied and beat." But if one interprets Orlick as a symbolic representation of something within Pip himself, then Orlick's accusations become intelligible. Orlick represents the repressed, but nevertheless violent, hatred of the bullied and beaten child finally emerging to confront the adult Pip.

Orlick symbolizes evil, not as something inexplicable and external to man, but as the unregenerate instincts and impulses that are an inevitable and natural aspect of human nature. Pip, as representative man in the novel, must learn to identify and to acknowledge the real sources of his sense of guilt if he is ever to move from childish passivity and dependence into responsible adulthood.

In the lime kiln scene, Orlick creeps up on Pip from behind. The direction from which the attack is launched is poetically appropriate. Pip's problem is not so much that he is unaware of his guilt, but that he tends to attribute its causes to the wrong sources. Confusing respectability with virtue, he feels he has lowered himself to the same despised level as Magwitch because he stole for him, and that he is indeed "coarse and common" because he was born a blacksmith's boy. It takes Pip years of struggle to acknowledge that his real fault in the first instance lay in his having allowed the encounter with the convict to place a barrier of secrecy between himself and Joe. In the second example, when he let Miss Havisham and Estella make him feel ashamed of his home and occupation, it was the shame itself that was wrong.

Pip's characteristic response to the guilt that oppresses him throughout the novel is usually mistaken. When he does not identify its causes incorrectly, he simply tries to bury it. He is frequently uncomfortably aware of how shamefully he treats Joe, but instead of facing his guilt realistically, he generally manages to talk himself out of it. Summoned to the village to see Miss Havisham, he decides at first that he ought to visit Joe as well:

> But, when I had secured my box-place by to-morrow's coach, and had been down to Mr. Pocket's and back, I was not by any means convinced on the last point, and began to invent reasons and make excuses for putting up at the Blue Boar. (GE, p. 213)

There is hope for Pip, because as he learns to understand the real origins of his sense of guilt, he also learns to forgive others. For Dickens, the two go hand in hand. If all men, by nature, are guilty, then all men need forgiveness. This is, I think, the obvious point of Pip's allusion to the parable of the publican and the Pharisee (GE, p. 436). Although it is on behalf of Magwitch that Pip prays, "O Lord, be merciful to him a sinner," Pip's symbolic acknowledgement of his own guilt has already been expressed in his conduct during Magwitch's trial. Pip sits up at the front of the courtroom, holding the prisoner's hand through the dock (GE, p. 433) in a public avowal of the bond he had so long struggled to deny. The private acknowledgement of the bond was made even earlier, in a passage which expressed the connection between Pip's growing ability to recognize his own failings while forgiving Magwitch his. The bond between them, expressed by their clasped hands, becomes one of love:[39]

> . . . when I took my place at Magwitch's side, I felt that that was my place henceforth while he lived.
>
> For now my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted, wounded, shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe. (GE, p. 423)

Great Expectations, as the opening chapter suggests, is set within a world in which the individual tends to see himself as an isolated being threatened and assaulted by his fellow-competitors in "the universal struggle." A characteristic response, exemplified in its most extreme form by Miss Havisham, is the tendency to flee from the arena of combat into the safety of a private world, erecting one's grievances into barriers between the self and the dangerous world without. Only love and forgiveness can break down the prison of the self, but the ability to forgive, for Dickens, depends very much on the individual's ability to recognize his own guilt.

Pip's gradually developing capacity to acknowledge his need for forgiveness, and thus to forgive others, is indicated in part by three heavily symbolic episodes contained in the last third of the novel. The emphasis on burning in each of the three episodes (the fire at Satis House, the encounter with Orlick in the lime kiln, the

the fever to which Pip succumbs after the death of Magwitch) suggests that Dickens wants the reader to connect the three events and to see them as parts of one continuing process.[40] In the first episode, Pip returns to Satis House, where Miss Havisham, who has finally realized how deeply she has injured him, asks if he can ever forgive her. Pip assures her that he can:

> "O Miss Havisham . . . I can do it now. There have been sore mistakes; and my life has been a blind and thankless one; and I want forgiveness and direction far too much, to be bitter with you." (GE, p. 377)

Although Pip's words contain a verbal recognition that he must forgive her because he needs forgiveness himself, his subsequent thoughts and deeds suggest the presence of a still unresolved hostility.[41] When Miss Havisham, in an agony of remorse, cries, "'What have I done! What have I done,'" Pip confesses to the reader that he could find no words either to comfort or answer her. Each remains isolated from the other. While Miss Havisham wrings her hands and repeats her cry, Pip silently contemplates what "a grievous thing" she had done in thus warping Estella's being, conscious of how, in secluding herself from "a thousand natural and healing influences," Miss Havisham had reversed "the appointed order of their Maker" (GE, p. 378). (This, by the way, is also Mrs. Clennam's sin.) Pip tells himself that he cannot look at Miss Havisham without compassion (GE, p. 378), yet at the same time he is very much aware of what he calls "her profound unfitness for this earth." The reader will recall that little Pip, after his first humiliating visit to Satis House, had experienced a vision of Miss Havisham as a hanged corpse, a vision which suggests something of the child's inarticulate sense of injury and resentment, as well as his desire to punish her. Significantly, in spite of all his avowals both to himself and Miss Havisham that he can indeed forgive her, that experience recurs:

> A childish association revived with wonderful force . . . and I fancied that I saw Miss Havisham hanging to the beam. (GE, p. 380)

His still unresolved antagonism blocks the needed reconciliation, and it is some unconscious glimpse of this, I think, that makes Pip both reluctant to leave, and irrationally fearful for Miss Havisham's safety. Returning to her room to reassure himself, he arrives just in time to see her engulfed with flame. As she runs towards him screaming, Pip is confronted with the terrible reality of his own anger, an anger suggested by his own description of his struggles to put out the fire:[42]

> . . . [I] closed with her, threw her down . . . we were on the ground struggling like desperate enemies . . . I still held her forcibly down with all my strength, like a prisoner who might escape. (GE, p. 381)

It is not until some hours later that Pip brings himself to perform the act which will validate his statement of forgiveness, when, having experienced and conquered the fire of his anger, he leans over Miss Havisham and touches her lips with his[43] (GE, p. 382).

Pip's second encounter with aspects of himself which he has hitherto denied occurs, as I have already argued, in his clash with Orlick in the lime kiln. The meeting significantly takes place just after Pip's heart has been "deeply and most deservedly humbled" (GE, p. 399) by a realization of his ingratitude. He has not yet, however, managed to come to terms with his feelings about his sister. Orlick's brutal delight in the murder of Mrs. Joe and his monstrous insistence on Pip's complicity in it present Pip with a horrifyingly concrete image of unresolved hatred. Dickens never suggests that Pip ultimately brings himself to forgive his sister, even though Pip appears to be on the verge of doing so at the time of Mrs. Joe's funeral:

> It was fine summer weather again, and, as I walked along, the times when I was a little helpless creature, and my sister did not spare me, vividly returned. But they returned with a gentle tone upon them, that softened even the edge of Tickler. For now, the very breath of the beans and clover whispered to my heart that the day must come when it would be well for my memory that others walking in the sunshine should be softened as they thought of me. (GE, p. 264)

The impulse is aborted by the silly ostentation of the funeral, and one never sees it recur. One might perhaps argue that the softening of his thoughts towards all men which Pip experiences under the stress of Orlick's threats could be considered to include Mrs. Joe, but the argument seems to me very tenuous. What is of more significance is the heightened awareness of guilt which Orlick's presence produces in Pip, and the accompanying consciousness of a desire for forgiveness. Pip not only finds himself "humbly beseeching pardon," but "melted at heart" by thoughts that he will never now be able to "take farewell, of those who were dear to me . . . explain myself to them, or ask for their compassion on my miserable errors" (GE, p. 404).

Pip's encounters with Miss Havisham and Orlick are, of course, not only significant in assisting Pip towards a recognition of his guilt, they are both also events which in their emphasis on fire imagery suggest moral purgation as well. The climax of the process occurs after the death of Magwitch. All of Pip's great expectations have collapsed; he is penniless, heavily (and apparently hopelessly) in debt, when, like Arthur Clennam in similar circumstances, he falls ill. In his delirium he dreams:

> . . . that I was a brick in the house wall, and yet entreating to be released from the giddy place where the builders had set me; that I was a steel beam of a vast engine, clashing and whirling over a gulf, and yet that I implored in my own person to have the engine stopped, and my part in it hammered off. (GE, p. 438)

In his dream Pip recognizes his complicity in a social system which, in its emphasis on selfish striving and competition, isolates and dehumanizes, and he begs to be released from it. In effect, he wants to stop the world and get off, to repudiate his great expectations and to return to the safer and lower levels of childhood and the forge. At first he appears to achieve his desire. He awakens on a beautiful spring morning to find himself lovingly tended by Joe who treats him now with none of the constraints or sense of social distance which had marred their previous encounters. In his physical helplessness, Pip is able to fancy that he is little Pip again, especially when Joe picks him up in his arms "as if," says Pip, "I were still the small helpless creature to whom he had so abundantly given of the wealth of his great nature" (GE, p. 442). All the barriers between them seem to dissolve as Pip haltingly tries to confess the guilty secret of his childhood and Joe delicately intimates that he has already guessed the truth and forgiven.

But Pip is not to be let off as lightly as these scenes might suggest. His repentence is necessary, but it does not release him from the burdens of existence in a fallen world. Pip's impression that he can wipe out the past and retreat to the world of his childhood are shown to be mistaken. As Pip's strength grows, so does Joe's manner change. The old childhood forms of address, "dear Pip," and "old chap," are gradually replaced by the more formal "Sir," and Mr. Pip." Joe withdraws from him emotionally, and finally leaves Pip altogether to return home to the forge. Pip attempts to follow, confident that he can marry Biddy and become the contented village blacksmith he might have been has there been no Magwitch or Miss Havisham, but he discovers that he cannot. Biddy has married Joe, and Pip must return to the world beyond the forge to work off his debts.

Great Expectations then is similar to Little Dorrit in that it concentrates, not on the predicament of innocence unjustly assaulted by evil, but on the plight of the fallen individual who must learn to accept the burden of his own guilt and to assume responsibility for it. The novel contains no devils because Dickens no longer sees evil as something apart from human nature, but as an inherent aspect of it. The solution lies, not in flight to some purer realm, but in the acknowledgement of individual responsibility. This point is reinforced by the second ending of the novel, which depicts Pip and Estella, in an obvious echo of Paradise Lost,[44] moving out from the ruined garden into a world clearly recognized as fallen.

The demonic, as representative of something extraneous to man's basic nature, has no real place within the moral universe of Great Expectations; nor, in spite of appearances, has innocence, its traditional opposite. I have already argued that the children in the novel cannot be described as innocent within any conventional understanding of the term. Dickens has instead, as he had done in Little Dorrit, apparently assigned the role of the innocent to an adult, Joe Gargery. But just as a closer examination of Orlick reveals how far Dickens has moved beyond the simple idea of the demonic, so too does a close scrutiny of Joe's innocence reveal it to be something much more complex than anything we have seen before.

At first glance, Pip's characterization of Joe suggests not only innocence, but the kind of innocence one associates with Dickens's early portraits of children. An illiterate who can barely manage to pick out the first two letters of his name, a hen-pecked husband who meekly submits to his shrewish wife, Joe appears to exhibit both the ignorance and the passivity which a younger Dickens tended to regard as essential attributes of innocence. These qualities however, which effectively create pathos when they are seen in the context of actual childhood, become ludicrous, even faintly contemptible, when associated with the brawny figure of the village blacksmith:

> Joe was a fair man, with curls of flaxen hair on each side of his smooth face, and with eyes of such a very undecided blue that they seemed to have somehow got mixed with their own whites. He was a mild, good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going, foolish, dear fellow--a sort of Hercules in strength, and also in weakness. (GE, p. 6)

Pip tells us he was accustomed to regard Joe as "a larger species of child" (GE, p. 7). The reader, however, observing the grotesque combination of immense physical strength with the flaxen curls and smooth face of the child, noting the "undecided" blue of the eyes, and listening to Joe's clumsy and disjointed speech, might be forgiven if he dismissed Pip's judgement as too generous by half, and regarded Joe instead as a species of village idiot--a Barnaby Rudge without Barnaby's poetic appeal.

Pip's judgement of Joe, however, is more an indication of the boy's youthful ignorance than a valid insight into the blacksmith's real identity. A closer examination of Joe reveals that his apparent innocence is very like Little Dorrit's. In spite of his bad grammar and clumsy ways, Joe is actually far wiser and far more competent than first appearances might suggest. One can point, for instance, not only to his clarity of vision (his matter-of-fact judgement on Pip's desperately grand apartments: "I wouldn't keep a pig in it myself" [GE, p. 209]), and to the profound wisdom of his advice about the nature of real gentlemanliness (GE, p. 66), but also to the scene in which a repentent Pip tries to confess the guilty secret of his early encounter with Magwitch. Joe forestalls him, as we have already noted, by gently indicating that he already knows:

> "Supposing ever you kep any little matter to yourself, when you was a little child, you kep it mostly because you know'd as J. Gargery's power to part you and Tickler in sunders, were not fully equal to his inclinations. Theerfore, think no more of it as betwixt two sech, and do not let us pass remarks upon onnecessary subjects." (GE, p. 444)

Joe's innocence, like Amy Dorrit's, is not only one which involves wisdom rather than ignorance, it is also an active rather than a passive quality. Dickens makes this point in Little Dorrit by stressing the contrast between Amy's quiet busyness and the rest of the society's neurotic longing for genteel idleness. Joe's work at his forge makes a similar point in Great Expectations. In addition, the novel also contains at least a hint that Joe exercises something like Little Dorrit's redemptive role in relation to others. He shares her Christ-like willingness to bear the burdens of others, as we learn when we discover that his patient submission to Mrs. Joe stems not from weakness, but from a conscious decision to atone for the sins of his father:

> "I see so much in my poor mother, of a woman drudging and slaving, and breaking her honest hart and never getting no peace in her mortal days, that I'm dead afeerd of going wrong in the way of not doing what's right by a woman, and I'd fur rather of the two go wrong the t'other way, and be a little ill-conwenienced myself." (GE, p. 45)

In particular, there are centain similarities between Amy's role in relation to Clennam and Joe's relation to Pip. There are some provocative implications in the fact that the prelude to Pip's recovery from illness involves Joe's quiet payment of some of Pip's more pressing debts, and that it is Joe's presence at his side which make Pip feel "that all my life since the days of the old kitchen was one of the mental troubles of the fever that was gone" (GE, p. 442).

It is tempting to see Joe as an innocent, particularly in view of the paradisal quality exhibited by both forge and countryside on Joe's wedding day:

> The June weather was delicious. The sky was blue, the larks were soaring high over the green corn . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> . . . the forge was a very short distance off, and I went towards it under the sweet green limes, listening for the clink of Joe's hammer. . . . The limes were there, and the white thorns were there, and the chestnut trees were there, and their leaves rustled harmoniously when I stopped to listen; but the clink of Joe's hammer was not in the midsummer wind.
>
> Almost fearing, without knowing why, to come in view of the forge, I saw it at last, and saw that it was closed. No gleam of fire, no glittering shower of sparks, no roar of bellows; all shut up and closed.
>
> But the house was not deserted, and the best parlour seemed to be in use, for there were white curtains fluttering in its window, and the window was open and gay with flowers. (GE, p. 453)

The freshness, the flower-decked landscape, and the silence of the forge, all suggest an Edenic world, the proper habitation for an apparently unfallen being like Joe. But in spite of this and the obvious parallels between Little Dorrit and Joe, I would argue that what Joe ultimately stands for is not really innocence at all. Innocence is a quality which by its nature, however much it may choose to concern itself with the inhabitants of a fallen world, stands essentially apart from that world. Little Dorrit chooses, in

Christ-like fashion, to share Clennam's imprisonment, to live and suffer among the inhabitants of the Marshalsea. But her ability to move freely in and out of the prison, her apocalyptic encounter with Mrs. Clennam, and above all, her wedding in the radiance of the light from the painting of Christ, followed by a deliberate "descent" into the roaring streets, all suggest that she belongs by nature to a transcendent realm.

There is no comparable glimpse of a transcendent reality in the world of Great Expectations, except perhaps in the allusion to the Final Judgement in the trial scene. Pip's "redemption," if one can even call it that, does not, even for a moment, lift him as Clennam is lifted at the time of his marriage, to a reality beyond the merely temporal. And just as the evil which Orlick embodies is not the other-worldly wickedness of the demonic, but the very this-worldly product of ordinary human selfishness and passion, so Joe's "innocence" is not really innocence in any theological sense, but the virtue to which imperfect human beings may aspire[45] by cultivating responsibility, discipline, and above all, unselfish love.

In part, Joe's association with work is one aspect of his link with the world of fallen man. The paradisal world to which innocence properly belongs is essentially one of ease, but Joe belongs most emphatically to the world of work. We see him, in fact, at his most imposing and dignified in his role as blacksmith and master of the forge. He is ill-at-ease and out of place in his Sunday (non-working) clothes, and the portion of his home which is reserved for leisure, Mrs. Joe's parlour, is, except on the occasion of Joe's marriage to Biddy, normally, by contrast with the life and activity of the forge, a cold and dead world:

> Mrs. Joe . . . uncovered the little state parlour across the passage, which was never uncovered at any other time, but passed the rest of the year in a cool haze of silver paper. (GE, p. 20)

The virtues which Joe embodies are not connected with the redeeming grace of an unfallen existence, but are the fruits of self-control, self-discipline and work, the precise qualities needed to limit and restrain the destructive aspects of man's selfish and passionate nature. It is interesting to note, in this connection, Geoffrey Thurley's observation on "the strange significance of Joe's trade," a trade which "brings him naturally into contact with the law that sees to the retention of malefactors." Joe is filled with compassion for Magwitch, but, notes Thurley, "It is not accidental that he has already helped recapture [him]," nor that he is pressed into service to mend the broken handcuffs for the soldiers.[46] There is here, although Thurley does not make the point, a suggestion perhaps of Gabriel Varden's symbolic role as the locksmith in Barnaby Rudge, a hint of the necessity of restraint and control in a world where most men are governed by passionate selfishness.

John Carey notes in passing that Great Expectations contains "two giants, Joe and Orlick, one good, one bad."[47] On the one hand, Joe and Orlick clearly stand for opposing values and attitudes. Orlick is dark, violent, destructive, a man filled with hatred and the lust for revenge. Joe is fair, gentle, loving and forgiving. If Orlick really were a devil (which of course he is not) one might expect to identify the relationship between the two characters as representative of Dickens's familiar opposition of the demonic and innocence. But although they are presented mostly in terms of contrast, Joe and

Orlick do have some things in common. Both are presences at the forge from the time of Pip's childhood, and both, more significantly, are blacksmiths. Thurley, mentioning the "strange significance of Joe's trade," does not discuss the ambivalence with which the figure of the smith has traditionally been regarded. On the one hand, the smith is a maker, subduing the stubborn materials of creation at his forge.[48] This is the tradition reflected in Donne's sonnet "Batter my Heart." An equally ancient tradition, responding to the smith's sooty appearance and familiarity with fire, links him with the demonic.[49] Orlick reflects this tradition when he frightens young Pip with his tales of the devil who lives in the dark corner of the forge. One might also recall the old legend that Cain himself was a blacksmith. The source of the ambivalence is the fire, and fire, as has been frequently noted,[50] is not only an important image in Great Expectations, it is also employed in a manner which expresses its ambiguity. In some scenes--the lime kiln, the fire at Satis House, the soldiers' pursuit of Magwitch by torchlight--it stands for something violent and destructive; in others--Wemmick's castle, Pip in the chimney corner with Joe--it obviously stands for love and warmth, home and hearth. Joe and Orlick, linked by the forge, are to be seen not as embodiments of innocence and the demonic, but as opposite responses to the reality of man's fallen nature. Orlick expresses its destructive capabilities; Joe, the master of the forge exhibits the self-discipline and forgiving love which turns passion into compassion.

Finally, I think we must ultimately reject the notion of Joe's innocence because in this novel of human guilt, not even he is completely free of it. Near the end of the novel he confesses to Pip that although "I done what I could to keep you and Tickler in sunders . . . my power were not always fully equal to my inclinations" (GE, p. 444). His inability to protect the child was unavoidable:

> " . . . when your poor sister had a mind to drop into you, it were not so much . . . that she dropped into me too, if I put myself in opposition to her, but that she dropped into you always heavier for it. I noticed that." (GE, p. 444)

He is, of course, the most virtuous character in the novel and he also functions as the standard of morality by which we judge the corruption of the world surrounding him. Nevertheless, the fact that he feels constrained to make this confession, suggests that he too, like the rest of fallen humanity, experiences his share of guilt.

Our Mutual Friend

The gradual darkening of tone and atmosphere which informs all of Dickens's later works reaches a climax in Our Mutual Friend. The disorganization and movement towards ultimate chaos which threatened the societies depicted in Bleak House, Hard Times, and Little Dorrit have accelerated.[51] The primeval mud of the opening chapters of Bleak House, mud which at least has substance and consistency, has given way in Our Mutual Friend to the whirling dust of the wasteland.[52] We are in a world where all things are resolving into dust, a dead, desert landscape of dry bones and wind-tossed fragments. The majority of the inhabitants of this world, whether paralyzed by a numbing sense of futility, like Eugene, at one end of the scale, or spurred into murderous action, like Bradley Headstone at the other, are characterized by a desperate need to discover some sort of order or purpose around which to organize their chaotic existences. Their various attempts to impose or to realize order, along with Dickens's analysis of their several understandings or misunderstandings of the nature and function of order is one of the important sub-themes of this work.

The longing for order springs from the perception, whether conscious or unconscious, that the world in which the characters find themselves is essentially a world of death and dissolution. The opening chapter, with its vivid image of Gaffer Hexam clad in his sodden, mud-stained clothing, peering eagerly into the filthy water for corpses to rob,[53] while his daughter veils her face in horror, establishes an atmosphere of gloom and decay which persists throughout the novel. The imagery of the first chapter, with its emphasis on mud and slime, ooze and filth, recalls the dissolving world of Bleak House, but while the river remains an important symbol throughout the work, imagery of dust, dryness, and isolation, beginning with the second chapter, is of major importance in communicating Dickens's vision of an atomistic world in which existence has become a living death.

The Veneering dinner party represents that world in microcosm. It is a feast of the living dead in which the guests are summoned to the table by a "melancholy retainer" whose tone invites them to "Come down and be poisoned, ye unhappy children of men" (OMF, p. 9). The dinner party offers only an appearance of life, a horrible parody of the love and fellowship which true feasts always represent for Dickens.[54] Nothing is real; everything is false. The guests are barely, if at all, acquainted with their host or with each other, yet Mr. Veneering insists upon treating them as if they were all very old, very dear, friends (OMF, p. 10), a piece of perversity which makes Mr. Twemlow fear for his sanity. Lady Tippins, a decayed old ruin of a Regency belle like Cleopatra Skewton, is so thickly painted and powdered that "you might scalp her, and peel her, and scrape her, and make two Lady Tippenses out of her, and yet not penetrate to the genuine article" (OMF, p. 119). She insists, nevertheless, on conducting herself with a grotesque air of girlish flirtatiousness, while her bored young "lovers" respond with thinly disguised contempt (OMF, p. 14).

During the evening, the conversation is strained and sporadic, coming in little bursts and flurries, interspersed with gloomy silences, until the talk turns to the subject of old John Harmon and his extraordinary will. In addition to a number of complicated directions for the disposition of his property, Harmon has left instructions for his own burial, with certain "eccentric ceremonies and precautions against his coming to life" (OMF, p. 15). With this statement, Dickens not only subtly foreshadows the younger Harmon's decision to bury his former self ever deeper and deeper, he also helps to draw our attention to the fact that most of the company at the Veneering's table have taken similar "precautions," in that they have chosen to isolate themselves from life and each other. Mr. Podsnap's life of rigid routine and air of implacable self-importance, and his hard-featured wife's bony stateliness isolate each of them as effectively as the layers of paint and powder behind which Lady Tippins chooses to hide. Mr. Twemlow, "dry [and] polite," sits with his cheeks drawn in "as if he had made a great effort to retire into himself some years ago" (OMF, p. 10). Eugene Wrayburn looks as if he had been "buried alive in the back of his chair" (OMF, p. 11), and lounges insolently at the table, ignoring his fellow guests, while his friend, Mortimer Lightwood, is locked up in a vague, resentful mood of despondency. The suggestion of isolation is also contained in the description of Mr. Veneering who is, in spite of his apparent gregariousness, "a sly, mysterious, filmy" man (OMF, p. 10). The filminess (and his name itself) implies the same opaque, closed-in quality of all the existences in the room.

As in A Tale of Two Cities, the novel suggests an inversion of life and death.[55] The world of the living is both a wasteland and a grave. Mr. Wilfer has to skirt "a tract of suburban Sahara" on his way home (OMF, p. 33). Boffin's Bower is set amidst the dust-heaps of Harmony Jail, where old Harmon "threw up his own mountain range, like an old volcano":

> ". . . and its geological formation was Dust. Coal-dust, vegetable-dust, bone-dust, crockery-dust, rough-dust and sifted dust--all manner of Dust." (OMF, p. 13)

Wegg's stall is positioned at the corner of what will become the new residence of the Golden Dustman: "a howling corner in the winter time, a dusty corner in the summer time, an undesirable corner at the best of times" (OMF, p. 44). The stall itself is "the hardest little stall of all the sterile little stalls in London," and the stock and its keeper are "as dry as the Desert" (OMF, p. 45). Jenny Wren lives near "a very hideous church . . . generally resembling some petrified monster" in a district with a "deadly kind of repose on it" (OMF, p. 221). Limehouse Hole, where Rogue Riderhood makes his abode is to him " a mere grave" (OMF, p. 350), while near the river itself, the signs over the wharves and warehouses, as Eugene observes, look "like inscriptions over the graves of dead businesses" (OMF, p. 171). Not even the coming of spring can revive this petrified world:

> It was not summer yet, but spring; and it was not gentle spring ethereally mild, as in Thompson's Seasons, but nipping spring with an easterly wind, as in Johnson's, Jackson's, Dickson's, Smith's, and Jones's Seasons. The grating wind sawed rather than blew; and as it sawed, the sawdust whirled about the sawpit. Every street was a sawpit, and there were no top-sawyers; every passenger was an under-sawyer, with the sawdust blinding him and choking him.
>
> . . . .
>
> The wind sawed, and the sawdust whirled. The shrubs wrung their many hands, bemoaning that they had been overpersuaded by the sun to bud; the young leaves pined; the sparrows repented of their early marriages, like men and women; the colours of the rainbow were discernible, not in floral spring, but in the faces of the people whom it nibbled and pinched. And ever the wind sawed, and the sawdust whirled. (OMF, p. 144)

The theme of life as death is repeated insistently. Eugene attends the Lammle wedding (where the bride's aunt, "a widowed female of a Medusa sort, in a stony cap" sits "glaring petrifaction at her fellow creatures" [OMF, p. 120]), "with a pervading air upon him of having presupposed the ceremony to be a funeral, and of being disappointed" (OMF, p. 119). The Podsnaps give a ball to mark their daughter's eighteenth birthday, but characteristically conceal the reason for the celebration:

> It was somehow understood, as a secret article in the state proprieties of Podsnappery, that nothing must be said about the day. Consequently this young damsel's nativity was hushed up and looked over, as if it were agreed on all hands that it would have been better that she had never been born. (OMF, p. 135)

During the ball itself, the dancers slowly circle the room, "like a revolving funeral" (OMF, p. 138).

Mr. Podsnap is able to endure the sterility of his existence by taking refuge in unalterable routine:

> . . . getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter-past,

> breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. . . . Nothing else To Be--anywhere! (OMF, p. 129)

The more sensitive, however, like Eugene Wrayburn, are paralyzed by a sense of meaninglessness: "'I am in a ridiculous humour,' quoth Eugene, 'I am a ridiculous fellow. Everything is ridiculous'" (OMF, p. 166), and he has long since given up trying to make any sense of himself or his life:[56]

> "You know that when I became enough of a man to find myself an embodied conundrum, I bored myself to the last degree by trying to find out what I meant. You know that at length I gave it up, and declined to guess any more." (OMF, p. 286)

Perhaps nothing in the novel more obviously illustrates the theme of life as death than the story of John Harmon. Having survived both a murderous assault and near drowning, he emerges from the water with a new identity. In another of the novel's "dire reversals," he feels himself to have been reborn, not to life, but to death:

> "It is a sensation not experienced by many mortals . . . to be looking into a churchyard on a wild windy night, and to feel that I no more hold a place among the living than these dead do . . . A spirit that was once a man could hardly feel stranger or lonelier, going unrecognized among mankind than I feel." (OMF, p. 366)

He wonders whether he should let himself return to life: "John Harmon is dead. Should John Harmon come to life?" (OMF, p. 372), but when Bella rejects him, decides to stay dead:[57]

> He went down to his room, and buried John Harmon many additional fathoms deep. He took his hat, and walked out, and, as he went to Holloway or anywhere else--not at all minding where--heaped mounds upon mounds of earth over John Harmon's grave. His walking did not bring him home until the dawn of day. And so busy had he been all night, piling and piling weights upon weights of earth above John Harmon's grave, that by that time John Harmon lay buried under a whole Alpine range; and still the Sexton Rokesmith accumulated mountains over him, lightening his labour with the dirge, "Cover him, crush him, keep him down!" (OMF, p. 378)

When human existence is perceived as so unremittingly sterile, meaningless or disconnected, death presents an alluring alternative for those who find no peace in life. Death becomes, like the river that softly calls to Betty Higden, "The Relieving Officer appointed by eternal ordinance" (OMF, p. 505). Jenny Wren recalls the visions she once enjoyed, and it is obvious that the "shining children" who invite her to join them are the blessed dead:[58]

> ". . . when I was a little child," in a tone as though it were ages ago, "the children that I used to see early in the morning were very different from any others that I ever saw. They were not like me: they were not chilled, anxious, ragged, or beaten; they were never in pain. . . . Such numbers of them, too! All in white dresses, and with something shining on the borders, and on their heads, that I have never been able to imitate with my work, though I know it so well. They used to come down in long bright slanting rows, and say altogether, 'Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!' When I told them who it was, they answered, 'Come and play with us!' When I said, 'I never play! I can't play!' they swept about me and took me up, and made me light. Then it was all delicious ease and rest till they laid me down, and said, all together, 'Have patience, and we will come again.'" (OMF, p. 239)

The brief moments of relative ease that Jenny enjoys in Riah's roof garden are explicitly identified with death:

> ". . . it's so high. And you see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and you feel as if you were dead." (OMF, p. 281)

And when Fledgeby, in some perplexity, asks how it feels to be dead, Jenny tells him:

> "Oh, so tranquil! . . . Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets, and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange good sorrowful happiness comes upon you!" (OMF, p. 281)

As in both A Tale of Two Cities, and, much earlier, The Old Curiosity Shop, death is depicted as that which releases one from the narrow confines of a grave-like world to the peacefulness, spaciousness and tranquility offered by "the loadstone rock of Eternity." Betty Higden rejoices that she is no longer young because "it would all have to be gone through again, and the end would be a weary way off, don't you see" (OMF, p. 382). Death not only offers rest, it can also, or so it would seem, preserve the virtuous from the temptations of this life, as Jenny indicates, when fearing that Lizzie will succumb to Eugene, she prays:

> "My Lizzie, my poor Lizzie! O my blessed children, come back in the long bright slanting rows, and come for her, not me. She wants help more than I, my blessed children!" (OMF, p. 349)

Death's appeal is intuitively perceived by even the most corrupt. Rogue Riderhood, run down by a steamer and hovering between life and death, for a time resists the efforts of his would-be rescuers to restore him to consciousness:

> . . . like us all, every day of our lives when we wake--he is instinctively unwilling to be restored to the consciousness of this existence, and would be left dormant, if he could. (OMF, p. 444)

But while many of the characters in the novel might look forward to death with keen anticipation, their attitude is rejected by Dickens. In The Old Curiosity Shop and A Tale of Two Cities, Little Nell and Sidney Carton are both granted the death they so obviously desire, but in Our Mutual Friend, as in Great Expectations, the major protagonists are denied that escape. The world may be a desert, and fallen man, in his despair, may long for the easeful gardens of death, but Dickens makes it clear that one must not court death, that it is one's duty to live and to make whatever atonement one can. John Harmon, in spite of the mounds he has heaped over his old self, must resume his buried identity and all the obligations that go with it.

More importantly, Eugene Wrayburn gradually comes to realize that he must try to resist death and use his restored life to make reparation for his past mistakes.

Eugene's gradual physical recovery after he has been nearly beaten to death and drowned by Bradley Headstone is accompanied by a corresponding spiritual regeneration. His immersion in the water suggests that he has undergone a symbolic baptism. This "baptism," however, is not one which cleanses him of sin. Indeed, the notion that it could is specifically rejected by the parody-baptism of Rogue Riderhood, who revives after his brush with death as much a scoundrel as ever, in spite of his daughter's wistful hope that "the old evil" might be "drowned out of him" (OMF, p. 445). Instead, the effect of the experience is to implant in Eugene a conviction of his guilt and of his need to make atonement. He has refused previously even to let himself think about his intentions towards Lizzie, but when he recovers consciousness after the attack, he confesses that he has wronged her, not only in fact, but "still more in intention" (OMF, p. 738). As partial reparation (his own word), he refuses to identify his assailant: "the guilty man, brought to justice, would poison her [Lizzie's] name" (OMF, p. 739). Nor is this all. He struggles fiercely to resist the unconsciousness which would provide an easy avenue to the death so many of the characters desire, in order to marry Lizzie. This too, as Mortimer realizes, is meant to be part of his reparation, and once Jenny Wren understands what he means to do, she, who had previously disliked and mistrusted him, kisses his shattered face and maimed hands in a gesture of symbolic absolution (OMF, p. 741). As Pip had come to realize, Eugene finally learns that he must live and work in the world, flawed as it is. The temptation to flee must be resisted. At the end of the novel he not only declares his intention to work for a living--to assume responsibility, in other words--he also abandons his earlier scheme for retreating to one of the colonies with Lizzie. Instead, he realizes that both duty and honour demand that he remain in England to face society with her, and in that realization he finally achieves the sense of purpose he had lacked.

Our Mutual Friend, then, like Little Dorrit, A Tale of Two Cities, and Great Expectations, takes place within an obviously fallen world, a world of spiritual imprisonment, fragmentation and death. The Arcadian dream, except in Baby Harmon's over-decorated nursery, has vanished. Death's allure as a possible avenue of escape from an intolerable reality is clearly recognized, but just as clearly rejected. As Eugene discovers, man himself is responsible for his predicament, and his only hope lies in accepting that fact and working to make whatever reparation he can.

There is no possibility of innocence in such a world, for either child or adult. Children and young people, in fact, are shown to be particularly vulnerable to the harm that such an environment can inflict. Little Johnny Higden dies as a mere baby, and the children who survive are shown to be maimed or stunted in a number of ways. Sloppy, abandoned in infancy, is feeble-minded. Jenny Wren, prematurely forced to assume the cares of adulthood, is warped and twisted by the burden, not only physically, but mentally as well, as her marked streak of sadism reveals. Young Fledgeby, on the other hand, a downy-cheeked youth, has adapted himself very efficiently to the ways of the world, with the result that he is a moral monster, while Georgiana Podsnap, repressed and cowed by her parents' excessive zeal to preserve her "innocence" is, as a result, frozen into an unnatural and sterile childhood. She is "an undersized damsel, with high shoulders, low spirits, chilled elbows, and a rasped surface of nose." Crushed in spirit, she is terrified of everyone and everything, including growing up. She seems, says the narrator, "to take occasional frosty peeps out of childhood into womanhood, and to shrink back again" (OMF, p. 129).

Although a number of critics have seen Mr. Boffin as the exemplar of innocence within the world of the novel, I find myself in strong disagreement with them.[59] It is true that Our Mutual Friend contains much to tempt one in that direction. One thinks, for example, of Noddy's provocatively named "Bower," of the narrator's description of the old man's "bright, eager and childishly enquiring" eyes (OMF, p. 46), and the fact that it is Mr. Boffin, of course, who devises and executes the test that proves Bella to be "the true golden gold at heart" (OMF, p. 772). He is also characterized by what Robert Baker describes as a "moral lucidity"[60] which he reveals, not only in his ability to fathom the malevolence of the Lammles, but even in such minor matters as his comic mispronunciations of the names of the Roman emperors. Vitellius, whom Boffin calls Vitel-us, and Belisarius (Bully-sawyers in Boffin's nomenclature), are, as Baker points out, aptly named: "Vitellius was indeed a glutton, and Belisarius a militaristic bully."[61]

The "Bower" however, is not only part of the desert landscape of the dust heaps, a domain Boffin surveys as he treads a path of ashes outlined by broken crockery (OMF, p. 55); within, for all its comfort and apparent paradisal quality, it is really two solitudes:

> It was a queerest of rooms, fitted and furnished more like a luxurious amateur tap-room than anything else . . . Facing the fire between the settles, a sofa, a footstool, and a little table formed a centrepiece devoted to Mrs. Boffin. They were garish in taste and colour, but were expensive articles of drawing-room furniture that had a very odd look beside the settles and the flaring gaslight pendant from the ceiling. There was a flowery carpet on the floor; but, instead of reaching to the fireside, its glowing vegetation shopped short at Mrs. Boffin's footstool, and gave place to a region of sand and sawdust.
>
> . . . .
>
> "These arrangements is made by mutual consent between Mrs. Boffin and me. . . . Mrs. Boffin, she keeps up her part of the room, in her way; I keep up my part of the room in mine." (OMF, p. 56)

Most of all, however, Mr. Boffin seems to me to be a throwback to the benevolent elderly gentleman of the early novels,[62] who devise, like Martin Chuzzlewit, Sr., fairy-tale tests, to rescue the hero at the last moment. Although U. C. Knoepflmacher argues that the novel prepares us to accept such fantastic improbabilities as real,[63] I find the final scenes "showing how the golden dustman helped to scatter dust" (OMF, p. 769) both sentimental and jarring, as have generations of readers. The problem has sometimes been attributed to a change of intention on Dickens's part. He has been accused of depicting Noddy's "corruption" so realistically that we feel we have been cheated when we are asked to accept it as imposture, and inevitably, some readers have been led to the conclusion, that as first conceived, the deception was no deception at all, that Dickens changed his mind. Francis X. Shea's article[64] fairly clearly absolves Dickens of that charge, but it does not eliminate the problem. As H. M. Daleski has commented: "Dickens's handling of Boffin, indeed, is the major blemish of Our Mutual Friend. . . . What Dickens is concerned with, as the dust mounds vividly suggest, is the corrupting influence of wealth . . . If we are meant to see that wealth corrupts, then we are surely also meant to see that it is no respecter of persons, that, like 'Tom's corrupted blood' in Bleak House, it strikes down good and bad alike. The corruption of a good, simple man like Boffin in other words, is necessary to the design of the novel."[65] It is for this reason, in spite of his superficial attributes of "innocence," that I do not regard Boffin as a figure of much significance to my general argument.

Apart from Boffin, among the other adult characters, Lizzie Hexam is probably the most likely figure to suggest innocence, or something like it. She is fairly clearly the most virtuous of them all, and like Little Dorrit's, her's is an active, rather than a passive, goodness. She looks after her young brother and provides for his education (albeit with disastrous results),[66] befriends Jenny Wren, successfully resists the sexual blandishments of Eugene, in spite of being in love with him, and most important of all, ultimately saves his life and, one might suggest, his soul as well. Apart from her goodness, however, there is very little about her which specifically suggests innocence. Unlike Little Dorrit, she is not particularly childlike in any way, and the only characteristic she shares with even the seemingly innocent Joe Gargery is his illiteracy. Far from being an innocent, she has in fact extensive experience of evil as her father's daughter, and is, as he tells her, a creature of the river however much she may hate it:

> "How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie? The very fire that warmed you when you were a baby, was picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very rockers that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut out of a piece of wood that drifted from some ship or another." (OMF, p. 3)

This in itself does not necessarily disqualify her from innocence if one defines it as something other than mere ignorance. Little Dorrit, after all, was born in the prison and is intimately acquainted with every aspect of that degrading atmosphere. But Lizzie can be said to be involved in evil in a way that Amy Dorrit is not, in that Lizzie actively assists her father in his grisly task of fishing corpses out of the river for money. An analogous role for Little Dorrit would have her hold the collecting box while her father duns his fellow collegians.

Lizzie herself regards her contact with the river as morally contaminating. Her father accuses her of hating it, and she does not deny it (OMF, p. 3). At least part of her distress comes, I should think, from her feeling that she is somehow involved with her father's guilt. When he is suspected of the Harmon murder, it seems to Lizzie that she is involved in "a murky shade of Murder" (OMF, p. 70), and her secluded life after his death is undertaken in conscious atonement:

> "For a short part of my life at home with father, I knew of things--don't ask me what--that I set my face against, and tried to better. I don't think I could have done more, then, without letting my hold on father go; but they sometimes lie heavy on my mind. By doing all for the best, I hope I may wear them out." (OMF, p. 526)

Dickens's refusal to depict Lizzie with the attributes of either a pre- or post-Dorrit variety of innocence is itself significant. I have argued that one of Dickens's chief pre-occupations during a good part of his career had to do with figuring out how to preserve innocence in a world seen in increasingly pessimistic terms. The pessimism does not diminish, but in Bleak House and Little Dorrit, his interest begins to move beyond the matter of the innocent's survival to reflect an increasing concern with the ways in which less-than-innocent mortals might achieve some sort of liberation or redemption. In Our Mutual Friend Lizzie is redeemed by her unselfish love and concern for others--"by doing all for the best"--but of even more importance is the fact that that same love is able to save Eugene.

It is worthy of note that Eugene is rescued, not by the intervention of an innocent like Little Dorrit, but by the efforts of a being who perceives herself as one of the fallen. Indeed, it is not her innocence, but Lizzie's experience of evil which enables her to rescue him:

> Her old bold life and habit instantly inspired her.
>
> . . . .
>
> Now, merciful Heaven be thanked for that old time, and grant, O Blessed Lord, that through thy wonderful workings it may turn to good at last!
>
> . . . .
>
> A sure touch of her old practised hand, a sure step of her old practised foot, a sure light balance of her body, and she was in the boat. (OMF, p. 699)

Throughout his description of Eugene's rescue, Dickens stresses the fact that it is Lizzie's past experience in an existence of which she is ashamed that makes it possible for her to save Eugene.[67] Unlike the Dickens of the earlier novels, the Dickens of the later period has come to believe that knowledge of evil is not only unavoidable in a fallen world; it is necessary as well. Goodness can only function effectively when it is armed with an intimate understanding of that which it sets out to defeat.

In a world where there are no innocents, there are no devils either. Bradley Headstone is the chief villain of the piece, but his special crime, murder, is one we are told that all men are capable of committing. As the Inspector comments when questioned about the Harmon case:

> "If a murder, anybody might have done it. Burglary or pocket-picking wanted 'prenticeship. Not so murder. We were all of us up to that." (OMF, p. 26)

In the act of murder, man proclaims his descent from Cain, the first murderer, and in Our Mutual Friend, the inherently murderous tendencies of human nature are revealed, not only in the number of actual murders and violent assaults which take place, but in the fatal ease with which thoughts of murder occur to even the timid, the respectable, and the virtuous. Georgiana Podsnap, for instance, expresses her dismay at the prospect of being asked to dance by exclaiming, "If I were wicked enough--and strong enough--to kill anybody, it should be my partner" (OMF, p. 137). (The interjected "and strong enough" almost suggests that lack of strength rather than lack of wickedness is the more important barrier.) She rejects the possibility of a marriage partner even more vehemently: "I should beg and pray to--to have the person taken away and trampled upon" (OMF, p. 258). Little Jenny Wren is particularly adept at devising ingenious torments for her enemies. Children who mock her twisted limbs ought, she says, to be crammed into black vaults and asphyxiated by having pepper blown in at them through the keyhole (OMF, p. 224). She knows what a drunkard deserves:

> "When he was asleep, I'd make a spoon red hot, and I'd have some boiling liquor bubbling in a saucepan, and I'd take it out hissing, and I'd open his mouth with the other hand . . . and I'd pour it down his throat, and blister it and choke him." (OMF, p. 243)

When Lizzie denies that the child would ever do such a horrible thing, Jenny reluctantly agrees, adding, however, "But I should like to" (OMF, p. 243). Sometimes the human potential for violence is expressed as no more than a half-formed idle wish, as when Lady

Tippins, hearing that Lizzie has disappeared, shrieks "'We shall every one of us be murdered in our beds!'" and Eugene eyes her reflectively, "as if some of us would be enough for him" (OMF, p. 414). At other times the threat is more serious, as when John Harmon, outraged by Wegg's attempts to blackmail Mr. Boffin, seizes the rascal by the throat, crying, "'I'd give a thousand pounds for leave to knock your brains out'" (OMF, p. 787), and later, pitching Wegg's hat out the window, adds, "'The wonder is . . . that I didn't try to twist your head off, and fling *that* out of window'" (OMF, p. 789). One could point to many other examples of otherwise respectable, even virtuous, people either committing or contemplating acts of violence against others, but the point, I think, is obvious. The ease and frequency with which minds turn to thoughts of violence in this novel, whether acted upon or not, illustrates the accuracy of the Inspector's definition of all men as potential murderers, and hence, as fallen beings.

If the Inspector is right, and if all men are indeed potential killers, one has no need to postulate devils in order to understand why the world has become a dusty, life-denying wilderness. Accordingly, although the novel contains a great many villains, there are no devils in *Our Mutual Friend*, because Dickens is now convinced that the responsibility for human suffering lies not with some *diabolus ex machina*, but with the selfishness and disordered passions of the human heart. We have seen in novels like *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* the gradual emergence of this theme. Now, in *Our Mutual Friend*, we see the climax of it in the appearance of the desperately respectable and thoroughly un-demonic murderer, Bradley Headstone.

Although the novel would seem to suggest that the source of human wickedness lies in our _disordered_ passions, Headstone appears to believe that it arises from the existence of passions _per se_. He is, as he admits to Eugene, "a man of strong feelings" (_OMF_, p. 344), but he is initially terrified of giving them any expression. Like Pip, he is a young man of humble origins, dissatisfied with his status and eager to rise, and even more than Pip, incapable of distinguishing between respectability and virtue. In his struggle to improve himself, he is not only trying to better his social position, he is also striving to achieve a certain moral status as well by ruthlessly denying everything he judges to be inherently disreputable in human nature--feelings, instincts and imagination.

Dickens's description of Headstone suggests the extent to which the schoolmaster's public character is the product of conscious denial and deliberate repression:

> Bradley Headstone, in his decent black coat and waistcoat, and decent white shirt, and decent formal black tie, and decent pantaloons of pepper and salt, with his decent silver watch in his pocket and its decent hair-guard round his neck, looked a thoroughly decent young man of six-and-twenty. He was never seen in any other dress, and yet there was a certain stiffness in his manner of wearing this, as if there were a want of adaptation between him and it, recalling some mechanics in their holiday clothes. He had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher's knowledge. He could do mental arithmetic mechanically, sing at sight mechanically, blow various wind instruments mechanically, even play the great church organ mechanically. From his early childhood up, his mind has been a place of mechanical stowage.
>
> . . . .
>
> He always seemed to be uneasy lest anything should be missing from his mental warehouse, and taking stock to assure himself.
>
> Suppression of so much to make room for so much, had given him a constrained manner over and above. Yet there was enough of what was animal, and of what was fiery (though smouldering), still visible in him, to suggest that if young Bradley Headstone, when a pauper lad, had chanced to be told off for the sea, he would not have been the last man in a ship's crew. Regarding that origin of his, he was proud, moody and sullen, desiring it to be forgotten. And few people knew of it. (_OMF_, pp. 217-18)

Headstone wears both his formal schoolmaster's garb and his learning awkwardly and uneasily. Both are calculated to confine and suppress the dangerous natural self which he fears ("'I don't show what I feel; some of us are obliged habitually to keep it down. To keep it down'" [OMF, p. 344]). And his sullen taciturnity concerning his pauper origins is in part, I would submit, an expression of a deeper shame. Guiltily aware of the unruliness of human nature, Headstone thinks that the answer lies in burying that nature under a dead weight of convention and mechanical rote learning.

What he is really trying to do is to impose some order on the fallen self. Order is an extremely important concept in the novel as a whole because Dickens sees society as chaotic and disorganized--"Aw in a muddle," as Stephen Blackpool says in Hard Times--and the characters in the novel respond variously to that fact. One is struck, for instance, by the amount of energy given to activities which involve sorting, arranging, and labelling of various kinds.[68] One recalls the careful sorting of the contents of the dust heaps, Harmon's role as secretary which seems to consist largely of docketing and arranging Mr. Boffin's chaotic papers, Venus's activity in his jumble of a shop as an articulator of human bones, and young Blight's alphabetical listing of imaginary clients ("his mind would have been shattered to pieces without this fiction of an occupation" [OMF, p. 87]).

The critical significance of order is further indicated by the manner in which Dickens presents those who have assumed the responsibility for maintaining order within society. Theirs, it would seem, is a sacred calling. The police station is a "monastery," and the Inspector, "the quiet Abbot of that monastery" (OMF, p. 26). Although outside the station, wild disorder reigns in the sky (OMF, p. 157), within all is "clean, cool and steady" (OMF, p. 158). Similar connotations colour the description of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters and its landlady, the significantly named Miss Abbey (" . . . some water-side heads . . . harboured muddled notions that, because of her dignity and firmness, she was named after, or in some way related to, The Abbey at Westminster" [OMF, p. 63]). Announcing, "*I* am the law here" (OMF, p. 63), Miss Abbey sets limits and metes out penalties to her clientele from her station behind the bar--her "sanctuary" and "haven . . . divided from the rough world" (OMF, p. 62). She sees her function in very specific terms as the establishment of order; nor does she underestimate the difficulties of that task. As she tells Lizzie:

> "It has been hard work to establish order here, and make the Fellowships what it is, and it is daily and nightly hard work to keep it so." (OMF, p. 69)

The creation and maintenance of order then is a matter of supreme importance, given the chaotic nature of the world and the creatures who inhabit it. But an equally critical matter involves the *nature* of that order. Headstone's attempts to establish mastery over himself require him to try to crush and dominate that which he perceives as chaotic (the "fiery" and "the animal" within him), and in his schoolroom he exercises an equally repressive authority over his pupils--one, which as Charley's case reveals, stunts and suffocates the creative energies of both the heart and the imagination. Headstone, until he finally abandons the effort, is always struggling to subdue himself through sheer force of will, and excoriating himself when he fails:

> "Oh, what a misfortune is mine," cried Bradley, breaking off to wipe the starting perspiration from his face as he shook from head to foot, "that I cannot so control myself as to appear a stronger creature than this, when a man who has not felt in all his life what I have felt in a day can so command himself!" He said it in a very agony, and even followed it with an errant motion of his hands as if he could have torn himself. (OMF, p. 292)

For Headstone, the key to order lies in domination; one subdues both the chaotic self and those of one's fellow-beings who stubbornly resist one's will by using force. This, I think, is the ultimate significance of murder in the novel; murder is the most drastic instrument for organizing reality according to one's will in that the murderer simply eliminates those whose existences disturb one's scheme.

Although Headstone, the most passionate of all the characters in the novel, is also the most murderous, he is not alone in his attempts to restructure reality to suit himself. Wegg and Riderhood use blackmail to coerce others into submitting to them, while characters like Mr. Veneering, Mrs. Wilfer, the Lammles and Fascination Fledgeby, try to achieve the same end by generating illusions so strong that others are overwhelmed into accepting them as reality. Murder, blackmail, pretence and violence are all used as means to gain mastery over a chaotic universe, but true order, the novel suggests, is neither so rigid nor so much the product of sheer will-power. The description of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters Inn is illuminating in the regard. As managed by Miss Abbey, it is a sanctuary of order amidst the brutal life of the riverside, but "in its whole constitution it had not a straight floor, and hardly a straight line:"

> Externally, it was a narrow lopsided wooden jumble of corpulent

> windows heaped one upon another as you might heap as many toppling oranges, with a crazy wooden veranda empending over the water. (OMF, p. 61)

It exhibits none of the mechanical, rigid symmetry of unnatural order; instead, in its gnarled old beams and walnut woodwork in which one "might trace little forests . . . and tiny trees like the parent tree, in full umbrageous leaf" (OMF, p. 61), one sees the free-flowing, natural forms of organic life.[69]

Headstone's notion of order is really death, as indicated not only by his funereal schoolmaster's uniform and the corpse-like stillness his face reveals when, for an instant, he manages to control himself (OMF, p. 398), but by his eventual fate as well. In an effort to draw suspicion away from himself, he commits the assault upon Eugene, costumed as Rogue Riderhood, a brutal river rat, and "whereas, in his own schoolmaster clothes, he usually looked as if they were the clothes of some other man, he now looked, in the clothes of some other man, or men, as if they were his own" (OMF, p. 631). Riderhood is his "double of coarse deportment," his violent and repressed side emerging to take full control, and Headstone can only ultimately subdue that self by murder and suicide. As he and Rogue grapple with each other by the side of the weir, Rogue boasts that he cannot be drowned, but Headstone retorts, "'I can be! . . . I am resolved to be. I'll hold you living and I'll hold you dead. Come down!'" (OMF, p. 802).

Headstone is doomed because he has striven for the impossible. He tries to destroy his passionate nature, and destroys himself in the process. Attempting to master his feelings by repressing them, he simply intensifies their destructive force. For Dickens, however, it is not passion itself which creates evil; what counts is the selfishness or unselfishness with which it is directed. Lizzie's love for Eugene is every bit as intense as Headstone's feelings for her, but Lizzie's is "a deep unselfish passion" which desires nothing for itself, and everything for the beloved:

> "I have no more dreamed of the possibility of my being his wife, than he ever has--and words could not be stronger than that. And yet I love him. I love him so much and so dearly, that when I sometimes think my life may be but a weary one, I am proud of it and glad of it. I am proud and glad to suffer something for him, even though it is of no service to him, and he will never know of it or care for it." (OMF, p. 528)

Headstone's, by contrast, is a jealous love, so needing to possess that it drives him to murder the man he perceives as his rival.

If Bradley Headstone's destruction illustrates the futility of attempting to deal with the passonate nature of fallen man through pure repression, one might well ask whether he can justly be held to account for his crimes. As he describes his state to Lizzie, he paints a picture of a man gripped by terrible forces beyond his control:

> ". . . I am under the influence of some tremendous attraction which I have resisted in vain, and which overmasters me. You could draw me to fire, you could draw me to water, you could draw me to the gallows, you could draw me to any death, you could draw to anything I have most avoided, you could draw me to any exposure and disgrace. (OMF, p. 397)

While there are no personifications of devils among the characters in the novel, one might be tempted to exonerate Headstone by interpreting his conduct as the result of something like demonic possession. Indeed, his violent epileptic seizures,[70] at least in the eyes of the unscientifically-minded, might even be adduced in support of that view, and the narrator himself seems to point to something of the sort when he describes the schoolmaster as a man "more really bewitched than the miserable creatures of the much-lamented times, who accused themselves of impossibilities under a contagion of horror." Headstone, he says, is a man "ridden hard by Evil Spirits . . . spurred and whipped and heavily sweated" (OMF, p. 555).

Ultimately, however, the temptation to find excuses for human wickedness in devils of either a visible or invisible nature is firmly rejected. Headstone alone is responsible for what he becomes. Although he expends an enormous amount of energy in seeming to fight against his destructive impulses, Dickens makes it clear that the schoolmaster is as much drawn as he is driven:

> Tied up all day with his disciplined show upon him, subdued to the performance of his routine of educational tricks, encircled by a gabbling crowd, he broke loose at night like an ill-tamed wild animal. Under his daily restraint, it was his compensation, not his trouble, to give a glance towards his state at night, and to the freedom of its being indulged. If great criminals told the truth--which, being great criminals, they do not--they would very rarely tell of their struggles against the crime. Their struggles are towards it. They buffet with opposing waves, to gain the bloody shore, not to recede from it. (OMF, p. 546)

Far from resisting, he succumbs willingly, and with pleasure. He deliberately seeks out Eugene, who torments him unmercifully, because he needs Eugene to justify the rage which he cultivates for its own sake:

> This man perfectly comprehended that he hated his rival with his strongest and worst forces, and that if he tracked him to Lizzie Hexam, his so doing would never serve himself with her, or serve her. All his pains were taken, to the end that he might incense himself with the sight of the detested figure in her company and favour.
>
> . . . .
>
> He knew equally well that he fed his wrath and hatred, and that he accumulated provocation and self-justification, by being made the nightly sport of the reckless and insolent Eugene. (OMF, p. 546)

Headstone's perverse pleasure in giving his violent impulses free rein is the perversity of the fallen creature, who, despairing of ever controlling himself by sheer force of will, finally abandons himself to all that is worst in his nature. Headstone's guilt lies not in the possession of such a nature; as the novel reveals, all men share it to a greater or lesser degree. His special sin consists of his failure to understand that only unselfish love and compassion have the power to bring order out of man's spiritual chaos, and for that failure, no devil can be held accountable.

Our Mutual Friend, then, is a work of some considerable significance in our understanding of the full pattern of Dickens's development. His conviction that the world is indeed a fallen wilderness is, if anything, presented even more powerfully here than it was in novels like Bleak House and Little Dorrit. His assessment of human nature is also more pessimistic; innocence is discarded as a possibility, and the responsibility for the fragmented, death-like quality of human existence is placed squarely on human, not demonic, shoulders. He shows that the moral and spiritual chaos which surrounds man is the result of the chaos within him. Even more bleakly, the novel suggests that most efforts to wrest order out of confusion are misguided or perverse, resulting only in greater disruption. And yet in spite of all that, the novel is not really ultimately pessimistic. If man has created his state, man can also mend it. The passion which dissolves community, unselfishly directed, can also restore it. True, the easy optimism of the early novels has disappeared, but what emerges in its place is the more realistic confidence of full maturity.

Edwin Drood

Dickens was working on Edwin Drood until just minutes before the collapse which led to his death the next day, and partly in response to those circumstances, the novel has sometimes been dismissed by critics as the half-hearted effort of a tired old man.[71] A superficial examination of the outline of the novel might seem to suggest that a worn-out writer has sought refuge in the familiar formulas of his youthful successes.[72] Once again, as in Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop, an apparently child-like innocent, the beautiful Rosa Bud, is threatened by an obviously demonic villain, the sinister John Jasper.

What Dickens is really attempting in Edwin Drood, however, seems to me to be far more complex and much more interesting than the foregoing might suggest. Edwin Drood is Oliver Twist written backwards. It is as if Dickens had asked himself what might have been the result if Oliver had been spared slum and workhouse to grow to young manhood lovingly reared by the Maylies and Mr. Brownlow. What might have been the effect upon his character? Would he have remained a child-like innocent in the best sense of the term? If Fagin had come upon him then, how might he have responded? Finally, is the preservation of the child from all evil necessarily the great good which the young Dickens had assumed it to be? Edwin Drood, in spite of its unfinished state, goes a long way towards answering these questions, and, while other novels have shown the confrontation with evil to be inevitable, reveals that it is necessary as well.

Rosa and Edwin, both of whom seem to be extraordinarily young, even for their relatively tender years, recall, as Thurley suggests, "the golden-haired children"[73] of the earlier novels. Both are orphans, but unlike the traditional Dickens waif, have enjoyed singularly secure and care-free childhoods. I shall have more to say about Edwin later, but for now, since I think she is by far the more important of the two, I shall concentrate on Rosa. Her position, it seems to me, is precisely the reverse of Oliver's--or of any of the other heroes or heroines of Dickens's early works. The essential outline of those novels, best exemplified by Oliver Twist, requires the orphaned innocent to be thrust out to fend for himself in a frightening and dangerous world. There, he finds himself beset by a demonic villain of far greater strength and cunning than he, whose sole object is the destruction of innocence. Eventually, after great trial and much suffering, during the course of which he usually manages to pick up one or more benevolent guardians, the innocent triumphs (more by passive resistance than anything else); the devil is vanquished; and the novel ends as the hero enters a safe and changeless garden. Rosa's history is that story written back to front. She is an Oliver who begins with the guardians and the garden, and this time Dickens himself is fully aware of consequences of that state which were only lightly (and, I think, quite unconsciously) implied in the ending to Oliver Twist.

As the novel opens, Rosa is almost eighteen years old, about to leave school, about to be married, and singularly unenthusiastic at the prospect of either. Unlike Oliver or Little Nell, David Copperfield or Flo Dombey, she has lived all her life surrounded by love and kindness. She has, it is true, experienced the deaths of both parents, but her orphaned state, far from rendering her defenceless, as it usually does in Dickens's novels, makes her into an object of universal affection and concern:

> The atmosphere of pity surrounding the little orphan girl when she first came to Cloisterham, had never cleared away. It had taken brighter hues as she grew older, happier, prettier; now it had been golden, now roseate, and now azure; but it had always adorned her with some soft light of its own. The general desire to console and caress her, had caused her to be treated in the beginning as a child much younger than her years; the same desire had caused her to be still petted when she was a child no longer. (ED, p. 80)

Her school-mates vie with one another to see "who should be her favourite, who should anticipate this or that small present, or do her this or that small service; who should take her home for the holidays; who should write to her the oftenest when they were separated, and whom she would most rejoice to see again when they were re-united" (ED, p. 80). Her father has taken every precaution before his death to secure her future happiness and security. He has not only appointed a kindly old guardian who adores her (Mr. Grewgious had secretly worshipped her mother and thus becomes a kind of surrogate father), he has also chosen a husband for her. This arrangement, seconded by Edwin's father before he too died, was made with no thought of imposing the will of their elders upon hapless children (Mr. Grewgious is careful to point out that neither Rosa nor Edwin will forfeit any part of their inheritance should they choose not to marry each other [ED, p. 90]), but, as Rosa herself recognizes, "'for the lasting good of both of us, and the lasting happiness of both of us'" (ED, p. 90). She has lived most of her life at Miss Twinkleton's Academy in Cloisterham, a cathedral city, which, as its name implies, tends to think of itself as a refuge from the rough and tumble world beyond. In short, she appears to enjoy at the outset of her career the kind of sheltered, tranquil existence which other Dickensian protagonists achieved only after long trial and much suffering.

Hillis Miller, discussing the ending of Oliver Twist, has, as I noted earlier, drawn attention to its underlying implications (probably unintended) that Oliver's entry into the paradisal world of the Maylies really means that the future can hold nothing more for him than perpetual childhood and permanent dependency,[74] that the static nature of that world precludes any possibility of growth, and that it is really only death under another name. This, I think, exactly describes Rosa's situation at the beginning of Edwin Drood. To begin with, like Oliver at the end of his adventures, she inhabits a world whose primary characteristic is death. The chapter which first introduces her to the reader opens with a description of the city in which she lives, a description which clearly suggests its death-like atmosphere:

> An ancient city, Cloisterham, and no meet dwelling-place for any one with hankerings after the noisy world. A monotonous, silent city, deriving an earthy flavour throughout from its cathedral crypt, and so abounding in vestiges of monastic graves, that the Cloisterham children grow small salad in the dust of abbots and abbesses, and make dirt-pies of nuns and friars.
>
> . . . .
>
> A drowsy city, Cloisterham, whose inhabitants seem to suppose, with an inconsistency more strange than rare, that all its changes lie behind it, and that there are no more to come. . . . So silent are the streets of Cloisterham (though prone to echo on the smallest provocation), that of a summer-day the sunblinds of its shops scarce dare to flap in the south wind; while the sun-browned tramps, who pass along and stare, quicken their limp a little, that they may the sooner get beyond the confines of its oppressive respectability. This is a feat not difficult of achievement, seeing that the streets of Cloisterham city are little more than one narrow street. (ED, p. 19)

Cloisterham, as the narrator's emphasis on dust and death, echoing emptiness, silence and narrowness suggests, is really a kind of grave in its attempts to deny "the noisy world."

Miss Twinkleton's Academy, located in Nun's House, is another such bastion. Dickens, perhaps betraying a certain Victorian prejudice against education for women, mostly treats the school and its headmistress as a joke. Nevertheless, his descriptions of both, comic though they are intended to be, further suggest the degree to which Rosa has been insulated from knowledge of the real world. The narrator, for instance, intrigued by the antiquity of Nun's House, wonders whether any of its former inhabitants "were ever walled up alive . . . for having some ineradicable leaven of busy mother Nature in them" (ED, p. 20), the same leaven which "has kept the fermenting world alive ever since" (ED, p. 20). But "while these may be matters of interest to its haunting ghosts," they form no part of the present curriculum of the Academy. Miss Twinkleton is a kindly version of Mrs. General, the governess in Little Dorrit, who cautioned her charges "that a truly refined mind will seem to be ignorant of anything that is not perfectly proper, placid and pleasant" (LD, p. 447). Among the items Miss Twinkleton deems unsuitable for contemplation by the tender young beings she guards are marriage (especially if romantic), and money, those very post-lapsarian inventions. She has a tender heart, and has even known romance, but her own long-dead affair with "Foolish Mr. Porters" is a matter of which, "in her scholastic state of existence, [she] is as ignorant as a granite pillar" (ED, p. 20). Rosa's impending marriage, sanctioned "by will and bequest," constitutes something of a problem, but Miss Twinkleton seeks, at least among the girls, to combat "the romantic aspect," by "affecting to shake her head over it behind Miss Bud's dimpled shoulders, and to brood on the unhappy lot of that doomed little victim" (ED, p. 20). Money matters are handled equally discreetly. She distributes the letters containing half-yearly school-bills to the girls "with an air as if [they] had not the least connexion with the bill[s], but were something of a delicate and joyful surprise" (ED, p. 144).

The effect of Rosa's carefully sheltered upbringing has been to preserve her, not from evil (Jasper invades the garden with ease), but from maturity. The innocent Oliver of this garden world, she is "spoilt," and wilful. Confidently "counting upon kindness from all around her" (ED, p. 81), she is not so much child-like, as simply childish, the word the narrator himself uses to describe her (ED, p. 21). Rosa is, in fact, almost as babyish as Dora Copperfield, as her absurd antics when Edwin Drood comes to visit her reveal (ED, pp. 22-26). She is supposed to be a young woman about to take the serious, and grown-up, step of marriage, but she enters the presence of her prospective husband coyly peeking out from underneath the apron she has flung over her head, like a two-year old clinging to mother's skirts. She cannot kiss him, she announces pettishly, because she has a candy in her mouth, and when Edwin asks where he might take her for a walk, demands to be taken to "the Lumps-of-Delight shop" where Edwin watches "gloomily," as she devours Turkish Delight with great zest, then licks her sticky fingers like a greedy little child.

Unlike Dora, whose childishness seems to be the result of sheer empty-headedness, and who remains a child to the day she dies, Rosa is a reasonably intelligent young woman[75] who, like Georgianna Podsnap (but with more brains and considerably more charm), has been locked into an unnaturally prolonged childhood by the well-meaning efforts of those around her to preserve her from harm. The Dickens of Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop appeared to think that this was the highest benefit one could confer upon a child; that his inherent innocence might last forever if only he could be preserved from contact with the evil world beyond; that if circumstances forced him to encounter that world, one must hope that he might be rescued before any fall from innocence took place. The Dickens of Edwin Drood, however, now clearly recognizes this as a species of sentimentality, and shows us that Rosa only begins to acquire maturity as she detaches herself from the garden world of irresponsible childhood.

Dickens's conviction that a well-meaning desire to protect the child from the risks and dangers of adult existence may be more of a curse than a blessing emerges strongly in his characterization of Edwin Drood. Although Edwin has had, simply by virtue of being male, far more direct contact with the world beyond Cloisterham than Rosa has, in essential matters his life has been just as much sheltered and protected from anxiety and hardship as hers. Placed under the guardianship of a seemingly doting uncle whose absolute dedication to his ward's happiness Edwin takes for granted (ED, p. 149), young Drood has been trained as an engineer, a profession which suits both his talents and his inclinations, and upon attaining his majority is guaranteed both a place in his father's old firm and the prospect of wedded bliss with the beautiful young Rosa. Like her, he finds his carefully arranged future somewhat restricting, and complains to Jasper:

> ". . . it's all very well for you. . . . Your life is not laid down to scale, and lined and dotted for you, like a surveyor's plan. . . . You can choose for yourself. Life, for you, is a plum with the natural bloom on; it hasn't been overcarefully

wiped off for you--" (ED, p. 12)

He hates, he protests, to be "moddley-coddlyed," but in spite of his verbal objections to a life "laid down to scale," he generally tends to accept his lot, not only with resignation, but with outright complacency. He begins his conversation with his uncle by complaining about his lack of choice; he concludes it, however, by depicting his future with an air of assurance which suggests that he has no particular desire to alter it in any way:

> "In some few months less than another year, you know, I shall carry Pussy off from school as Mrs. Edwin Drood. I shall then go engineering into the East, and Pussy with me. And although we have our little tiffs now, arising out of a certain unavoidable flatness that attends our love-making, owing to its end being all settled beforehand, still I have no doubt of our getting on capitally then, when it's done and can't be helped. In short, Jack, to go back to the old song I was freely quoting at dinner (and who knows old songs better than you?), my wife shall dance, and I will sing, so merrily pass the day." (ED, p. 16)

The fragment of song which he quotes is reminiscent of one of Dora Copperfield's light-hearted little ditties "about the impossibility of ever on any account leaving off dancing, La ra la, La ra la" (DC, p. 543), and suggests something of the serene, indeed pastoral, quality of the future he fondly envisages.

Edwin, then, like Rosa, has enjoyed a remarkable freedom from the kind of deprivation and suffering earlier Dickensian innocents had to endure. The end product, however, of such careful nurture, is not a saintly innocent, but a young man who is emotionally shallow, too prone to take his good fortune for granted, and woefully ignorant of the real nature of love and commitment. He himself confesses that he is "'but a shallow, surface kind of fellow'" (ED, p. 15), although he does not appear to be much troubled by that fact. His habit of "taking things in general so very easily" (ED, p. 82) infuriates Neville Landless, who remarks bitterly that "'it might have been better for Mr. Drood to have known some hardships'" (ED, p. 75), while Mr. Grewgious is so offended by Edwin's lack-lustre performance as a suitor, and irreverent bandying about of Rosa's pet name, that he preaches a pointed little sermon on the characteristics of the "true lover" (ED, p. 122).

Dickens's position then, at the beginning of Edwin Drood, is strikingly opposed to what we found at the conclusion of Oliver Twist. The characters of Edwin and Rosa alike reveal that the well-intended attempt to preserve childish innocence only results in the spiritual and emotional stunting of the child's proper development, that the "safe world" is in fact a dead world, and that trial and conflict are necessary for growth. The kind of garden world the Maylies constructed for Oliver is rejected, however, not only for these reasons, but because the mature Dickens realizes, as he had begun to perceive in both Bleak House and David Copperfield, that no human environment, however carefully designed, can hope to exclude the presence of evil. The "loving" guardian Edwin's father has chosen for his son, the teacher Rosa's mentors have selected for their ward, is the demonic Jasper, who as choir master also occupies a position of considerable importance within the cathedral itself, the spiritual heart of Cloisterham.

Critics have argued endlessly over the fate of Edwin,[76] but I think we must take Dickens's word for it that Jasper did actually murder him.[77] Edwin's passive acceptance of a "life laid down to scale," his general reluctance to try to alter it for himself, and his invincible confidence in his uncle's love for him go far to explain why he dies, while Rosa survives. In spite of her apparent childishness and feminine helplessness, she is actually far shrewder, far more realistic, and ultimately much tougher than Edwin. Her elders' efforts to keep her a child have been only partially successful. Although Edwin complains about the "flatness" of a love affair whose outcome has been settled in advance, it is Rosa, not Edwin, who realizes that such security may also be morally damaging: "'We should both of us have done better, if What is to be had been left What might have been'" (ED, p. 29), a judgement the narrator sees as evidence of "a woman's nature in the spoilt child" (ED, p. 29). He is right: there is a woman behind that childish facade, and she is gradually pushing Rosa towards adulthood. Indeed, the exaggerated quality of Rosa's childish mannerisms in itself suggests a conscious clinging to an identity which has already begun to crumble. One winces as one listens to Rosa describing herself as "'a young little thing'" (ED, p. 29), or "'such a mite of a thing'" (ED, p. 67) precisely because one senses a certain self-consciousness which is foreign to the nature of real childhood. Rosa works too hard at being the little girl to be entirely convincing in that role. She tries to maintain an attitude of childish ignorance, not just of evil, but of anything unpleasant, even going to the lengths of stuffing her fingers in her ears and "beseeching not to be told any more" (ED, p. 82) when rumours begin to circulate concerning the quarrel between Edwin and Neville, but the emerging "woman's nature" the narrator glimpsed intuitively recognizes evil as Edwin simply cannot. Rosa hates and fears Jasper from the very beginning, and no scene in the novel more vividly emphasizes the differing perceptions of the two young people than the following, which occurs just after the pair (significantly, at Rosa's suggestion) have agreed to dissolve their engagement:

> "Don't look round, Rosa . . . Didn't you see Jack?"
> "No! Where?"
> "Under the trees. He saw us, as we took leave of each other. Poor fellow! he little thinks we have parted. This will be a blow to him, I am much afraid!"
> She hurried on, without resting, and hurried on until they had passed under the gatehouse into the street; once there, she asked:
> "Has he followed us? You can look without seeming to. Is he behind?"
> "No. Yes, he is! He has just passed out under the gateway. The dear sympathetic old fellow likes to keep us in sight. I am afraid he will be bitterly disappointed!"
> She pulled hurriedly at the handle of the hoarse old bell, and the gate soon opened. Before going in, she gave him one last wide wondering look, as if she would have asked him with imploring emphasis: "O! don't you understand?" And out of that look he vanished from her view. (ED, p. 153)

Edwin sees Jasper first, but he is so naively confident of his uncle's devotion that he remains sublimely unconscious of the threat which Rosa only too clearly senses, as her panicky hurry and imploring last look indicate. As Jasper remarks sardonically to Edwin on an earlier occasion: "'You won't be warned, then? . . . You can't be warned.'" (ED, p. 16).

Edwin's ignorance leads to his death. Rosa, however, try as she might, cannot resist the movement toward adult knowledge. Signs of its emergence are to be found not only in her terrified recognition of Jasper as evil, but in her growing dissatisfaction with her own condition as she compares herself with Helena. She needs Helena, she confesses, because "'I don't understand myself: and I want a friend who can understand me, very much indeed'" (ED, p. 68). Helena puts words to Rosa's fear that Jasper loves her (ED, p. 68), and although Rosa characteristically tries to reject that knowledge ("'O! don't, don't, don't! . . . Don't tell me of it!'"), the example of the other girl's frankness and courage emboldens Rosa to express at last her perception that Jasper represents a sexual threat:

> ". . . when he watched my lips so closely as I was singing, besides feeling terrified I felt ashamed and passionately hurt. It was as if he kissed me, and I couldn't bear it, but cried out. You must never breathe this to any one. Eddy is devoted to him. But you said to-night that you would not be afraid of him, under any circumstances, and that gives me--who am so much afraid of him--courage to tell only you." (ED, p. 69)

Even more significantly, for the process of her necessary loss of innocence, is her growing awareness of her helpless complicity in the disturbing events of the novel. She knows, for instance, without really being told, that Edwin and Neville have quarelled over her (ED, p. 84) and feels a corresponding guilt:

> Rosa thought of this unlucky quarrel a great deal, and thought of it with an uncomfortable feeling that she was involved in it, as cause, or consequence, or what not, through being in a false position altogether as to her marriage engagement. (ED, p. 84)

She suspects Jasper of murdering his nephew long before his outrageous avowals in the garden of Nun's House turn suspicion into certainty, and with that suspicion comes again, a sense of her own guilt:

> Rosa's mind throughout the last six months had been stormily confused. A half-formed, wholly unexpressed suspicion tossed in it, now heaving itself up, and now sinking into the deep . . . . Jasper's self-absorption in his nephew when he was alive, and his unceasing pursuit of the inquiry how he came by his death, if he were dead, were themes so rife in the place, that no one appeared able to suspect the possibility of foul play at his hands. She has asked herself the question, "Am I so wicked in my thoughts as to conceive a wickedness that others cannot imagine?" . . . she had reflected, "What motive could he have, according to my accusation?" She was ashamed to answer in her mind, "The motive of gaining me!" And covered her face, as if the lightest shadow of the idea of founding murder on such an idle vanity were a crime almost as great. (ED, p. 225)

Rosa's guilt is complex: if Jasper is innocent, then she is guilty of wicked thoughts; if he is not, then she must bear some of the guilt for the murder in that she may be his motive. Guilt not only darkens her past, it threatens her future as well, in that Jasper accompanies his declaration with a threat to destroy Neville, and through him, Helena, unless Rosa grants him a receptive hearing:

> "Miss Landless has become your bosom friend. You care for her peace of mind?"
> "I love her dearly."
> "You care for her good name?"
> "I have said, sir, I love her dearly."
> . . . "I am unconsciously giving offence by questioning again. I will simply make statements . . . You do care for your bosom friend's good name, and you do care for her peace of mind. Then remove the shadow of the gallows from her, dear one!"
> "You dare propose to me to--"
> "Darling, I dare propose to you." (ED, p. 222)

Rosa later begs Helena for reassurance that she had to reject the choir master, and that she "'couldn't help it'" if this made him "'malicious and revengeful'":

> "I couldn't hold any terms with him, could I?"
> "You know how I love you, darling," answered Helena, with indignation; "but I would sooner see you dead at his wicked feet."
> "That's a great comfort to me! And you will tell your poor brother so, won't you? And you will give him my remembrance and my sympathy? And you will ask him not to hate me?" (ED, p. 247)

In effect, Rosa is learning, as Esther Summerson and Arthur Clennam learned before her, that one cannot act in a fallen world without incurring guilt.

Although Rosa feels utterly powerless before Jasper, attributing to him the "power to bind her by a spell" (ED, p. 226), she is not really as helpless as she imagines. True, the garden of Nun's House proves no barrier to Jasper; he penetrates it with ease. Although she hears him out in numb terror, finally collapsing in hysterics after he has left, as soon as she recovers, this hitherto very-much sheltered young lady finds within herself the courage to leave Cloisterham and to travel up to London all by herself. Here we see a significant reversal (already foreshadowed in Martin Chuzzlewit) of the progress of Dickens's earlier innocents, who generally fled the corruption of London for the safety of the uncontaminated countryside. The London Rosa enters is no purer or safer than it was in those early novels:

> At length the train came into London over the housetops; and down below lay the gritty streets . . .
>
> "Hiram Grewgious, Esquire, Staple Inn, London." This was all Rosa knew of her destination; but it was enough to send her rattling away again in a cab, through deserts of gritty streets, where many people crowded at the corner of courts and byways to get some air, and where many other people walked with a miserably monotonous noise of shuffling feet on hot paving-stones, and where all the people and all their surroundings were so gritty and so shabby!
>
> There was music playing here and there, but it did not enliven the case. No barrel-organ mended the matter, and no big drum beat dull care away. Like the chapel bells that were also going here and there, they only seemed to evoke echoes from brick surfaces, and dust from everything. As to the flat wind-instruments, they seemed to have cracked their hearts and souls in pining for the country. (ED, p. 227)

The imagery of the passage subtly evokes some of Dickens's favourite metaphors for the fallen world, the desert, with its dust and grit and heat, which appeared in A Tale of Two Cities, and the prison with its sound of shuffling feet, the primary image of Little Dorrit. Here, the city is further characterized by the cracked and discordant music which fills it.

Rosa's entry into the city which is both a prison and a desert is the most potentially dangerous step she takes in her journey towards adulthood. One recalls Oliver's initiation into London, where he becomes one of Fagin's victims, and Flo Dombey's abduction in the streets by the witch-like Mrs. Brown, as well as young David Copperfield's nightmare encounter with the ogreish pawn-broker. In his portrayal of Rosa, however, Dickens implies that, while it is nevertheless necessary for the child to leave behind what has become a sterile garden and to enter the world of experience, the dangers of that passage can be minimized. Throughout the novel one notices a curious emphasis on images of drowning and swimming. Rosa's mother, for instance, drowned as a very young woman and Rosa remembers her as "a pretty little creature like herself (not much older than herself, it seemed to her), who had been brought home in her father's arms, drowned. The fatal accident had happened at a party of pleasure. Every fold and colour in the pretty summer dress, and even the long wet hair, with scattered petals of ruined flowers still clinging to it, as the dead young figure, in its sad, sad beauty lay upon the bed, were fixed indelibly in Rosa's recollection" (ED, p. 80). When Edwin first vanishes, the banks of the river are carefully searched in the belief that he has drowned (ED, p. 175), while Canon Crisparkle, we are told, almost drowned as a boy, but was rescued by another child (ED, p. 238). Once saved, Crisparkle took up swimming with great enthusiasm, "perpetually pitching himself head-foremost into all the deep running water" (ED, p. 7).

Associated with the images of swimming and drowning is the sailor, Mr. Tartar, a new character who is first introduced near the end of the novel, and who helps to smooth Rosa's way in London. He is, as it turns out, the boy, now grown, who originally rescued Canon Crisparkle years ago; Rosa, hearing the tale for the first time, finds herself wishing the "Heaven . . . had but sent such courage and skill to her poor mother's aid" (ED, p. 238). In Tartar's presence Rosa feels very safe and secure; he could, she thinks, "have caught her up and carried her out of any danger, miles and miles without resting" (ED, p. 241). His face is deeply sunburned, frank and open (ED, p. 237), but characterized by "far-seeing blue eyes [that] looked as if they had been used to watch danger afar off, and to watch it without flinching, drawing nearer and nearer" (ED, p. 241).

Tartar obviously represents some sort of security against the dangers of leaving the garden world, which are just as obviously symbolized by drowning. (The fact that Rosa recalls her mother as a drowned figure decked in bright summer colours and ruined flowers is just as significant as her memory of her as a young girl like herself.) Tartar's role as rescuer is strongly bound up with his identity as a sailor. His rooms, in their beautiful orderliness and cleanliness ("purity" is the word the narrator uses), remind Rosa of a ship. He has, like Riah in Our Mutual Friend, created a roof-garden above the mouldering pile of Staple Inn and this "garden in the air," this "marvellous country, that came into sudden bloom like the country on the summit of the magic bean-stalk" (ED, p. 241) has itself, with its neatly rigged awning, "a sea-going air . . . so delightfully complete, that . . . the whole concern might have bowled away gallantly with all on board, if Mr. Tartar had only clapped to his lips the speaking trumpet that was slung in a corner, and given hoarse orders to heave the anchor up, look alive there, men, and get all sail upon her" (ED, p. 243).

Tartar's function as potential rescuer and his association with gardens might lead one to regard him as yet another example of Dickens's standard benevolent guardians--a sea-going Mr. Brownlow, or a younger version of Captain Cuttle. In the early novels, the role of such a guardian is clear; he rescues the child from the dangerous city and carries him off to some pastoral retreat where innocence may exist in safety. Tartar does take Rosa on an idyllic journey to a garden world, but he also carries her back to a still death-like city. The whole episode has obviously symbolic connotations. Hearing that Rosa has never been on the river, Tartar takes her and Grewgious in his boat to "some everlastingly-green garden, needing no matter-of-fact identification here" (ED, p. 253):

> . . . then the tide obligingly turned--being devoted to that party alone for that day; and as they floated idly among some osier-beds, Rosa tried what she could do in the rowing way, and came off splendidly, being much assisted . . . Then there was an interval of rest under boughs (such rest!) . . . and then came the sweet return among delicious odours of limes in bloom, and musical ripplings; and, all too soon, the great black city cast its shadow on the waters, and its dark bridges spanned them as death spans life, and the everlastingly-green garden seemed to be left for everlasting, unregainable and far away. (ED, p. 254)

The garden on the river, as Thurley comments, is "thoroughly lifted onto an other worldly level."[78] It represents, I would argue, a reassuring vision of a reality beyond the dead city and is intended to smooth the child's passage from innocence to experience. The child need not be destroyed (drowned) by that transition. It can be supported by the wisdom of others, until it learns to swim, as Canon Crisparkle did, or it can be taught, as Rosa's "splendid" efforts at the oars (made with "much assistance") suggest, to navigate the dangerous waters of life's river with some confidence. Rosa's thoughts on the day following this journey make it clear that the expedition has been for her a kind of symbolic farewell to childhood, and a recognition that the rest of her life must be lived within the confines of a fallen world:

> "Cannot people get through life without gritty stages, I wonder!" Rosa thought next day, when the town was very gritty again, and everything had a strange and an uncomfortable appearance of seeming to wait for something that wouldn't come. No. She began to think, that, now the Cloisterham school-days had glided past and gone, the gritty stages would begin to set in at intervals and make themselves wearily known! (ED, p. 254)

"The gritty stages" set in almost immediately, as she leaves the Staple Inn and Tartar's garden to live with Miss Twinkleton at a lodging-house where her old teacher and Billikin, the landlady, keep up a constant warfare with each other:

> All this did not improve the gritty state of things in London, or the air that London had acquired in Rosa's eyes of waiting for something that never came. (ED, p. 259)

As the weeks wear on, and Rosa continues to make her home in London and to endure the perpetual bickering of Miss Twinkleton and Billikin, "the neighbours began to say that the pretty girl at Billikin's, who looked so wistfully and so much out of the gritty window of the drawing-room seemed to be losing her spirits. The pretty girl might have lost them but for the accident of lighting on some books of voyages and sea-adventure" (ED, p. 260). The strengthening effect of the stories of voyages and sea-adventure is an obvious link with Tartar, and suggests, even though we see no more of Rosa after this, that the transition from childhood to adulthood has been made, not without some suffering (her drawn and wistful looks), but at least with something that will enable her to cope with the new reality.

Rosa's progress reveals that Dickens has largely abandoned his youthful conviction that the loss of childhood innocence is an unmitigated disaster, that the child's entrance into the fallen world of adult society is necessarily a catastrophic event. One might reasonably enquire, then, whether he has now made a complete about-face, whether he has come to regard the impulse to cherish childhood as pure sentimentality, and to believe, with Tony Weller, that early exposure to the school of hard knocks, such as Dickens himself endured, is the best preparation for life. The answer, of course, is no. True, the child must enter the adult world at some point, but if it is dangerous to try to hold him in the nest too long, it is just as perilous to push him out too soon. The story of Edwin and Rosa suggests the pitfalls of over-protection, but equally, the story of Neville and Helena indicates the hazards of the opposite approach.

Unlike Edwin and Rosa, the Landlesses have had to undergo the traditional hardships of the typical Dickens orphan. They are, as their surname suggests, the dispossessed. Their mother's death left them, like David Copperfield after Clara's death, in the hands of a brutal stepfather who seems even more sadistic than Mr. Murdstone:

> "Our mother died there [says Neville] when we were little children. We have had a wretched existence. She made him [the stepfather] our guardian, and he was a miserly wretch who grudged us food to eat, and clothes to wear. . . . [he] was a cruel brute as well as a grinding one. . . . I have seen him beat [Helena] more than once or twice, and I never forgot it." (ED, p. 60)

Dickens's early innocents, like Nell or Oliver, could suffer cruel treatment with no loss of original innocence. An inherent sanctity prevented any moral damage to their characters. Helena and Neville appear at first as if they might embody a kind of innocence, in that, although mistreated, they have been reared far from the corrupting influence of civilization in the "wild, tropical dominion" of Ceylon. Both have a shy, half-wild look which suggests something like the romantic notion of the noble savage. Canon Crisparkle, on first encountering them, sums up his mental impressions:

> An unusually handsome lithe young fellow, and an unusually handsome lithe girl; much alike; both very dark, and very rich in colour; she, of almost the gypsy type; something untamed about them both; a certain air upon them of hunter and huntress; yet withal a certain air of being the objects of the chase, rather than the followers. Slender, supple, quick of eye and limb; half shy, half defiant; fierce of look; an indefinable kind of pause coming and going on their whole expression, both of face and form, which might be equally likened to the pause before a crouch or a bound. (ED, p. 57)

Dickens makes it very clear, however, that neither Helena nor Neville can be seen as innocent in any sense which would indicate a moral superiority. Their sufferings have given each of them a far greater capacity for emotion than either the shallow Edwin or the still unawakened Rosa, but, at least in Neville's case, the emotions are essentially violent and destructive. He hurls the wine glass at Edwin's head, tells Crisparkle it was a good thing his stepfather died when he did "'or I might have killed him'" (ED, p. 60), and acknowledges that he stands in great need of guidance and direction:

> "I have had, sir, from my earliest remembrance, to suppress a deadly and bitter hatred. This has made me secret and revengeful. I have been always tyrannically held down by the strong hand. This has driven me, in my weakness, to the resource of being false and mean. I have been stinted of education, liberty, money, dress, the very necessaries of life, the commonest pleasures of childhood, the commonest possessions of youth. This has caused me to be utterly wanting in I don't know what emotions, or remembrances, or good instincts--I have not even a name for the thing, you see!--that you have had to work upon in other young men to whom you have been accustomed." (ED, p. 62)

Helena has been less seriously damaged than her brother, but only because she exercises immense self-control fuelled by pride:

> "You spoke of my sister's tears. My sister would have let him [the stepfather] tear her to pieces, before she would have let him believe that he could make her shed a tear." (ED, p. 61)

If she is neither as "tigrish" nor as "mis-shapen" as Neville, she is nevertheless uncomfortably aware that her upbringing has left her with many deficiencies:

> "I am a neglected creature . . . unacquainted with all accomplishments, sensitively conscious that I have everything to learn, and deeply ashamed to own my ignorance." (ED, p. 67)

Premature exposure to evil has heightened the disordered passions which, as we saw in Our Mutual Friend, are the mark of fallen man, while the lack of any effective guardianship or guidance during childhood has left those passions dangerously uncontrolled.

The guide appointed to instruct Neville is Canon Crisparkle. The clergyman is a character who is clearly intended to be seen in opposition to John Jasper, as Joe Gargery is to Orlick in Great Expecations, and to much the same purpose. Once again, as with the earlier pair, light is set against dark.[79] Crisparkle is "fair and rosy" (ED, p. 7), while Jasper is "a dark man . . . with thick, lustrous, well-arranged black hair and whiskers" (ED, p. 8). Crisparkle has a "boy-like" (ED, p. 7) manner which makes him seem much younger than his years; Jasper "looks older than he is, as dark men often do" (ED, p. 8). "'You,' Jasper tells the clergyman, 'are always training yourself to be, mind and body, as clear as crystal, and you always are, and never change; whereas I am a muddy, solitary, moping weed'" (ED, p. 166).

In spite of the obvious contrasts, there are, however, some important similarities which tend to link Crisparkle and Jasper as Joe and Orlick are linked by their common occupation as blacksmiths. Both Jasper and Crisparkle are functionaries of the cathedral: Jasper is its choirmaster, Crisparkle is one of its canons. Both have as well a secondary role as teachers; Jasper as Rosa's music master and Crisparkle as Neville's tutor.

It is tempting to argue, as one is similarly tempted in Great Expectations, that, if one is meant to be seen as demonic (as Jasper clearly is), then the other must be intended to represent innocence; that the conflict between the two is essentially a Manichean struggle, as Thurley[80] and others have suggested, between the forces of absolute darkness on the one hand, and absolute good, or innocence, on the other. There is something to be said for this view. Like Joe, Canon Crisparkle has a certain child-like quality about him. The narrator frequently calls attention to his boyishness and one sees it manifested in part in his great enthusiasm for schoolboy pursuits like boxing and swimming. He lives in Minor Canon's Corner which, whatever the turbulence of its past, is now pervaded by a "blessed air of tranquillity," with his adoring mother:

> What is prettier than an old lady--except a young lady--when her eyes are bright, when her figure is trim and compact, when her face is cheerful and calm, when her dress is as the dress of a china shepherdess: so dainty in its colours, so individually assorted to herself, so neatly moulded on her? Nothing is prettier, thought the good Minor Canon frequently, when taking his seat at table opposite his long-widowed mother. (ED, p. 50)

Mrs. Crisparkle is a sort of Clara Copperfield grown old, with nothing of Clara's silliness left but a certain wilfulness concerning her own opinions (ED, p. 96). And her son is still very much his mother's boy: "the two words that oftenest did duty together in all her conversations [being] 'My Sept'" (ED, p. 50). As the narrator describes the Canon, cheerfully and dutifully submitting to his mother's administration of various remedies for non-existent ills (ED, p. 100), they seem like a Clara and a David Copperfield left to enjoy long years of peace at the Rookery as innocent mother and son. Every morning finds Mr. Crisparkle at his mother's side, she "standing to say the Lord's Prayer aloud, and her son, Minor Canon nevertheless, standing with bent head to hear it, he being within five years of forty: much as he had stood to hear the same words from the same lips when he was within five months of four" (ED, p. 50). Madrigals ("Tell me, shep-herds, te-e-ell me; tell me-e-e, have you seen [have you seen, have you seen, have you seen] my-y-y Flo-o-ora-a pass this way?" [ED, p. 9]) are a staple of the musical evenings at Minor Canon's Corner and provide, along with the Dresden-shepherdess mother, another link with the idyllic world of the pastoral.[81] As the Canon goes through his daily exercise of shadow-boxing in front of a looking glass, the narrator tells us that "his radiant features teemed with innocence, and soft-hearted benevolence beamed from his boxing gloves" (ED, p. 49).

Nevertheless, while the kind of imagery I have just cited might seem to indicate that Mr. Crisparkle is meant to be seen as an innocent, there are other aspects of his portrayal which suggest that he is really meant to be regarded simply as, in the words of the narrator, a "good man" (ED, p. 7). His child-like manner, like his supposedly poor eyesight (ED, p. 51), is, in part, a masquerade affectionately assumed to please his mother. He has neither the ignorance nor the helplessness which are characteristic of innocence in Dickens's early novels. That same keen vision which the narrator so frequently stresses, vision sharp enough to perceive a gold watch half-buried in mud at the bottom of the Weir from a vantage point along the top of the bank (ED, p. 184), along with his passion for boxing, "feinting and dodging with the utmost artfulness, and hitting out from the shoulder with the utmost straightness" (ED, p. 49), suggests a far more alert and aggressive response to the world than the passive and unsuspicious attitudes of Dickens's traditional children. He reminds one, in fact, of Mr. Tartar, with his "far-seeing blue eyes" (ED, p. 241), ever on the watch for danger.[82]

Most important of all is Mr. Crisparkle's identity as Neville's teacher. He is supposed to be preparing him for the study of the law (ED, p. 198), which is in itself a significant point. Most of the instruction we actually see being given, however, has to do with matters of conduct (ED, pp. 63, 78, 106, 199). Dickens's early innocents, like Pickwick, Oliver and Nell, are no less virtuous than the Minor Canon, but they are too unselfaware to teach others. They do not give lessons; they simply are. Crisparkle, however, is clearly cast as moral guide and mentor, and virtue, as he defines it, is not so much something one possesses as something one aspires to. He is, as Jasper remarks, "'always training [himself]'" (ED, p. 166), and that training has to do with imposing order on man's selfish nature by cultivating self-control and self-forgetfulness. Unselfishness is the key. As Bradley Headstone's fate demonstrates, simple repression will not answer. In his youth, Neville was "always tyrannically held down by the strong hand" (ED, p. 62), with the results we have already discussed. Instead, Crisparkle recommends the example of Helena, who has "learnt how to govern what is proud in her nature" (ED, p. 199), inspired by her love for her brother:

> " . . . bending her pride into a grand composure that is not haughty or aggressive, but is sustained confidence in you [Neville] and in the truth, she has won her way through those streets [London] until she passes along them as high in the general respect as any one who treads them. Every day and hour of her life since Edwin Drood's disappearance, she has faced malignity and folly--for you--as only a brave nature well directed can." (ED, p. 199)

Crisparkle is really teaching Neville salvation; how to win one's way "through these streets" with safety. As he counsels him on the necessity of self-forgetfulness and self-control, Helena murmurs (with perhaps just a shade too much Victorian piety for modern tastes), "'Follow your guide now, Neville . . . and follow him to Heaven'"[83] (ED, p. 106). Crisparkle also, by the example of his own selflessness ("There was no more self-assertion in the Minor Canon than in the schoolboy who had stood in the breezy playing-fields keeping a wicket" [ED, p. 193]) and his compassionate concern for Neville, makes the latter better able to endure the symbolic imprisonment Jasper's persecution has created:

> "How goes it, Neville?"
>
> "I am in good heart, Mr. Crisparkle, and working away."
>
> "I wish your eyes were not quite so large and not quite so bright," said the Minor Canon, slowly releasing the hand he had taken in his.
>
> "They brighten at the sight of you . . . If you were to fall away from me, they would soon be dull enough."
>
> "Rally, rally!" urged the other, in a stimulating tone. "Fight for it, Neville!"
>
> "If I were dying, I feel as if a word from you would rally me; if my pulse had stopped, I feel as if your touch would make it beat again . . . But I have rallied, and am doing famously." (ED, p. 196)

Neville's notion that a touch from Crisparkle could rally him, even when his pulse had stopped, might suggest that Dickens has in mind a concept of innocence like the Christ-like quality exhibited by Little Dorrit. His association with light and water, in a world so much characterized by darkness and dust, is also provocative. I think ultimately, however, that that interpretation must also be rejected. In his last novel, as indeed in all the novels which follow Little Dorrit, Dickens has completely dispensed with the concept of innocence as anything more than a childish stage on the road to adulthood. Crisparkle's constant attention to training suggests that he is on his guard against something in himself as well as against danger in the rest of the world. Jasper's comment, which I have already quoted twice, is again illuminating: "'You are always training yourself to be, mind and body, as clear as crystal, and you always are, and never change.'" Crisparkle's crystalline purity may suggest a Christ-like innocence, but one notes that it is a quality only preserved by constant vigilence, not an inherent and natural attribute.

Finally, although it is perhaps only a minor point, since little is made of it in the existing portion of the novel, I would argue that Crisparkle cannot ultimately be regarded as an innocent because he too, like Joe Gargery in Great Expectations, can be seen to have some share in the general guilt, the guilt which is, as Rosa discovers, an inevitable accompaniment to action within a fallen world. With the best of motives, he sets in motion the events which lead to the fatal meeting and Edwin's death, while even the fact that he urged this meeting on Neville in the interests of reconciliation is regarded as damning evidence against young Landless:

> Concerning the reconciliatory nature of the appointed meeting between the two young men, very little could be made of that in young Landless's favour; for it distinctly appeared that the meeting originated, not with him, but with Mr. Crisparkle, and that it was urged on by Mr. Crisparkle; and who could say how unwillingly, or in what ill-conditioned mood, his enforced pupil had gone to it? (ED, p. 186)

Crisparkle, as his name and sun-like nature imply, is a spirit of light who retains his shining purity within the deceptively paradisal world of Cloisterham only by unremitting vigilance. By doing so, he become a guide and mentor for others, training them in the self-discipline and self-forgetfulness which are man's only defence against his selfish passions.

His demonic opposite is, of course, Jasper, and there can be little doubt that Dickens intended him to be seen as demonic. He is explicitly characterized as such on a number of occasions. Under the stress of powerful emotion, "his working features and his convulsive hands" become "absolutely diabolical" (ED, p. 220), while his violent anger with the child he calls "a baby-devil" makes him seem "an older devil himself" (ED, p. 140). In her terror of him, Rosa imagines that he "could pass in through the wall when he is spoken of" (ED, p. 68), a characterization which, if not explicitly demonic, at least suggests an awesome power. In part, his demonic identity is also suggested by his resemblance to other Dickensian devil-villains, both early and late. Like Bradley Headstone, for example, he hides a violent and passionate nature under a veneer of respectability. A bachelor like Headstone, and of about the same age, he too is a murderer motivated, at least in part, by sexual jealousy. His passionate declaration to Rosa sounds very much like Bradley's wild confession to Lizzie, both in its intensity and its perversity:

> "Rosa, even when my dear boy was affianced to you, I loved you madly; even when I thought his happiness in having you for his wife was certain, I loved you madly; even when I strove to make him more ardently devoted to you, I loved you madly; even when he gave me the picture of your lovely face so carelessly traduced by him, which I feigned to hang always in my sight for his sake, but worshipped in torment for years, I loved you madly; in the distasteful work of the day, in the wakeful misery of the night, girded by sordid realities, or wandering through Paradises and Hells of visions into which I rushed, carrying your image in my arms, I loved you madly.
>
> . . . .
>
> I don't ask you for your love; give me yourself and your hatred. (ED, p. 220)

Jasper is, however, much more explicitly demonic than Headstone, and his portrait also contains echoes of much earlier devils. The scene with Rosa in the garden of Nun's House not only recalls a similar scene between Carker and Edith Dombey, but, as Jasper insolently showers Rosa with impudent endearments ("dearest Rosa," "charming Rosa," my beloved," "my darling" [ED, pp. 220-22]), one is also reminded of Quilp's outrageous proposals to Little Nell. But if Jasper is like Quilp, Carker and Headstone in his sexual aggressiveness, he is also, in his strong association with darkness and earth, reminiscent of Vholes in Bleak House. Like him, Jasper is a creature of darkness and death, a spirit who tries to annihilate light even as he hungers to possess it. Lounging against a sundial as he tries to seduce Rosa, he sets "as it were, his black mark upon the very face of day" (ED, p. 219). He hangs the portrait he secretly worships in the same dark corner that contains his piano and his music books:

> Even when the sun shines brilliantly, it seldom touches the grand piano in the recess, or the folio music-books on the stand . . . or the unfinished picture of a blooming schoolgirl. (ED, p. 8)

He is also given to watching Edwin, whom he calls "bright boy" (ED, p. 9) with "a look of hungry, exacting, watchful and devoted affection" (ED, p. 9) which suggests something of the same dark desire to consume light which characterizes Vholes' relationship with Richard Carstone, or indeed, Tulkinghorn's with Lady Dedlock.

Jasper then is a devil, but a devil with a difference. The demonic nature of Dickens's early devils, like Quilp and Fagin for example, is simply a given. One cannot imagine any process by which they become demonic; they simply are. This is not the case with

Jasper. He is a devil who has chosen to become one in response to a life that has become even more suffocatingly safe and secure than Rosa's or Edwin's. It is not, I would argue, too far-fetched to see Jasper's devil-nature as a kind of innocence gone rotten. In his description of London, and of Rosa after she enters it, Dickens calls attention to the air that both the city and the girl have of "waiting for something that never came." Exiled from the paradise that always lies, as Auden remarks, back in time, fallen man longs for the paradise regained which lies ahead; not Eden, but the New Jerusalem. I have already noted the novelist's characterization of Cloisterham as a sterile paradise, a garden of death. In addition, however, another set of images, this time specifically linked with the Cathedral and its choir, contains an ironic echo of St. John's descriptions of the New Jerusalem and its choir of white-robed saints in the Book of Revelation. In John's vision, the New Jerusalem is a city of jewels:

> And the building of the wall of it was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. (Rev. 21:18-20)

Within, the saints, those "which have not defiled their garments; and . . . shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy" (Rev. 3:4), make up a heavenly choir:

> What are these which are arrayed in white robes? . . . These are they which came out of great tribulation. . . . Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in his temple. . . . They shall hunger no more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. (Rev. 7:13-17)

When these passages from Revelation are set against the following description of Cloisterham Cathedral, a number of ironic parallels emerge. Mr. Grewgious peeps in through the open door of the Cathedral and exclaims:

> "Dear me . . . it's like looking down the throat of Old Time."
>
> Old Time heaved a mouldy sigh from tomb and arch and vault; and gloomy shadows began to deepen in corners; and damps began to rise from green patches of stone; and jewels, cast upon the pavement of the nave from stained glass by the declining sun, began to perish. Within the grill-gate of the chancel, up the steps surmounted loomingly by the fast-darkening organ, white robes could be dimly seen, and one feeble voice, rising and falling in a cracked monotonous mutter, could at intervals be faintly heard. In the free outer air, the river, the green pastures, and the brown arable lands, the teeming hills and dales, were reddened by the sunset: while the distant little windows in windmills and farm homesteads, shone, patches of bright beaten gold. In the Cathedral, all became gray, murky, and sepulchral, and the cracked monotonous mutter went on like a dying voice, until the organ and the choir burst forth, and drowned it in a sea of music. Then the sea fell, and the dying voice made another feeble effort, and then the sea rose high, and beat its life out, and lashed the roof, and surged among the arches, and pierced the heights of the great tower; and then the sea was dry, and all was still.
>
> Mr. Grewgious had by that time walked to the chancel-steps, where he met the living waters coming out. (ED, pp. 93-94)

Cloisterham Cathedral, the spiritual heart of the city that imagines "all its changes lie behind it, and that there are no more to come" (ED, p. 18), represents an attempt to enjoy a premature blessedness. The Cathedral, however, is not an enclave of the eternal, but a grave filled with decay--"like looking down the throat of Old Time," as Mr. Grewgious comments. It is a parody-heaven, containing false, time-withered shadows of the elements of St. John's vision. The precious gems of the New Jerusalem's foundations are here represented by the fading jewels, cast by a declining sun, which perish even as we watch. The white robes of the choir, which the narrator earlier described as "sullied" (ED, p. 9), glimmer faintly through the growing darkness. Although the light of the setting sun still brightens the green pastures and little houses of the world beyond, the world which Cloisterham strives to deny, the Cathedral excludes that light, perhaps in ironic imitation of that other world whose inhabitants "need no candle, neither light from the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light" (Rev. 22:5). The "multitude" of the saints "who cried with a loud voice" (Rev. 7:10) have dwindled into a single feeble voice, rising and falling in a cracked, monotonous mutter, while even the music of organ and choir ("the stream of living water" in the narrator's sardonic phrase) is, for all its violent energy, only a dying music which eventually fails, leaving the sea dry, in an emblem of sterility. It is also significant that that which "beats . . . the life out" of that one feeble voice of praise, and ultimately triumphs over it is the sound from the "fast-darkening organ" and the choir directed by Jasper.

The choir of saints in St. John's vision are "those who have known great tribulation." As we have already noted in our discussion of Rosa, Edwin and Canon Crisparkle, Dickens appears to make a similar link, if not specifically between sainthood and tribulation, then between virtue and conflict, between responsible adulthood and hardship. In his late novels, as we have observed, Dickens clearly identifies the impulse to evade the harsh realities of human existence through a retreat into dreams of innocence as an immature, escapist fantasy. In Edwin Drood, he goes even farther, to suggest that the effort to avoid the necessary encounter with suffering, either by slipping back into an infantile Eden, or by seeming to leap over life into an earthly, and therefore false, New Jerusalem will not only fail, it may itself generate the evil it seeks to escape. The figure of Jasper is very important in Dickens's development of this theme. The choirmaster has, in effect, tried to bypass the suffering which is the fate of man in a morally ambiguous world by selfishly attempting to construct a life which excludes all risk, all danger. In the process he becomes demonic.

A famous passage in Milton's Aeropagitica helps us, I think, to understand what has happened to Jasper:

> I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly, we bring not innocence into the world; we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary.[84]

Jasper, whom Mr. Grewgious describes as "a slinking individual" (ED, p. 201), has rejected the "dust and heat," represented by a "gritty" London in this novel, to cloister himself in an existence which is too safe, too unchallenging:

> "You were going to say . . . what a quiet life mine is. No whirl and uproar around me, no distracting commerce or calculation, no risk, no change of place, myself devoted to the art I pursue, my business my pleasure." (ED, p. 13)

He does not, however, feel blessed in this apparently tranquil state where there is no "risk," no "distractions," no "change," instead, he feels as if he had been buried alive. "'My lot,'" he complains to Durdles as together they explore Cloisterham's tombs, "'is cast in the same old earthy, chilly, never-changing place'" (ED, p. 45). He has rejected the trial "which purifies us," and in the corruption of his being, both he and his music have become demonic:

"The cramped monotony of my existence grinds me away by the grain.

> How does our service sound to you?"
> "Beautiful! Quite celestial."
> "It often sounds to me quite devilish. I am so weary of it. The echoes of my own voice among the arches seem to mock me with my daily drudging round. No wretched monk who droned his life away in that gloomy place, before me, can have been more tired of it than I am. He could take for relief (and did take) to carving demons out of the stalls and seats and desks. What shall I do? Must I take to carving them out of my heart?" (ED, p. 14)

I have earlier described Jasper as representing a kind of innocence gone rotten (innocent, of course, only in the sense that he appears to exist in the kind of paradisal world conventionally associated with innocence.) In Aeropagitica Milton describes untried virtue as a "blank," "possessing only an excremental whiteness,"[85] in an image which suggests something both death-like and decaying. By rejecting "the race where that immortal garland is to be run for," Jasper becomes the corrupting presence in the Cathedral services which turn them into a hellish parody. It is the music which he conducts which struggles with the "one feeble voice" of praise, and which "beats its life out" in a foreshadowing of his assault on Edwin.

Jasper's life, because he has rejected the trial which not only purifies but which is in fact the whole point of earthly existence, is utterly without meaning. He is aware of the futility of his existence (he offers Rosa his past and present "wasted life" [ED, p. 223]). He tries to impose a meaning upon it, but without sacrificing the sterile security which he both hates and cannot give up. Rosa finds purpose by venturing out into the dust and heat; Crisparkle by, as it were, "the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth," and by his constant "training" (an oblique response, perhaps, to Milton's rejection of "unexercised virtue" and to his comment that "our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise, as well as our limbs and complexion").[86] Jasper, however, seeks to find meaning within his dead world through opium visions which seem to represent a perverse attempt at transcendence. (He despises Princess Puffer because her visions cannot "rise to" anything "higher" than dreams of butchers' shops and public houses, implying that his can.) What he dreams of, aside from exotic pagan locales filled with lurid life and colour, is, of course, murder. Murder becomes the antidote for the "cramped monotony" of his existence because it seems to hold out the promise of the excitement, the risk, and the danger that his ordinary life excludes. As Princess Puffer slyly questions him while he lies in an opium trance, he hints at what he had anticipated in the murder, under the image of a journey:[87]

> "It was a journey, a difficult and dangerous journey. . . . A hazardous and perilous journey, over abysses where a slip would be destruction." (ED, p. 266)

The reality, however, fell far short of his expectations:

> "I did it millions and billions of times. I did it so often and through such vast expanses of time that when it was really done, it seemed not worth the doing, it was done so soon." (ED, p. 266)

He has sought freedom from change as the organist of Cloisterham; instead he finds death. He seeks timelessness, and finds only tedium. He dreams of murder as an act that will release him from the tyranny of the moment into "vast expanses of time," but "when it was really done, it seemed not worth doing, it was done so soon." The murder is, in fact, his demonic version of the trial "which purifies us." His bitter disappointment as he strives to relive the event under the influence of opium shows clearly what he was looking for:

> "This is a vision. I shall sleep it off. It has been too short and easy. I must have a better vision than this; this is the poorest of all. No struggle, no consciousness of peril, no

entreaty,--" (ED, p. 268)

Rosa is sustained in the midst of the dust and heat of the race by her vision of the "everlastingly-green garden." Jasper, in a demonic inversion, tries to sustain himself in the midst of his fugitive and cloistered existence with visions of murderous strife and conflict, where not even the peril and the struggle are his, but his victim's.

Jasper then is clearly demonic, but not as Fagin, Quilp, Carker, or, indeed, any other of Dickens's early devil figures are, in spite of his superficial resemblances to them. The early devils are obviously personifications of some supernatural principle of evil, and representatives of something external to human nature. Even Rigaud, a late devil who represents human evil, is a larger-than-life figure, static and obviously symbolic. Jasper, however, for all his demonic attributes, is a human being who has chosen to emulate the demonic. He represents evil, certainly, but evil as it is generated by man in his futile attempts to escape the realities of the fallen world in which he is destined to live. Geoffrey Thurley, who regards Edwin Drood as a "work of extreme religious intensity"[88] seems to imply that the work is ultimately pessimistic because, while it depicts a world "already dead, awaiting some apocalyptic restoration to the 'everlastingly-green garden'"[89] the city's air of "waiting for something that wouldn't come" (ED, p. 254) suggests a hope that will never be realized.[90] I would argue, however, that Edwin Drood, in spite of its apparently bleak presentation of man's world as a dead world, of man's music as flawed, even demonic, is ultimately an optimistic novel. There is at least a hint of the possibility of regeneration even within the dusty purlieus of Cloisterham itself.

In his initial description of it which stresses its antiquity, its dustiness and silence, and its grave-like quality, the narrator nevertheless calls attention to its "many gardens" which he describes as its "most abundant and the most agreeable evidences of progressing life" (ED, p. 19). Significantly, "even its drooping and despondent little theatre has its poor strip of garden, receiving the foul fiend, when he ducks from the stage into the infernal regions, among scarlet beans or oyster shells, according to the season of the year" (ED, p. 19). An even clearer indication of potential regeneration, of course, is contained in the final description of Cloisterham and the Cathedral:

> A brilliant morning shines on the old city. Its antiquities and ruins are surpassingly beautiful, with a lusty ivy gleaming in the sun, and the rich trees waving in the balmy air. Changes of glorious light from moving boughs, songs of birds, scents from gardens, woods, and fields,--or, rather, from one great garden of the whole cultivated island in its yielding time,--penetrate into the Cathedral, subdue its earthy odour, and preach the Resurrection and the Life. The cold stone tombs of centuries ago grow warm; and flecks of brightness dart into the sternest marble corners of the building, fluttering there like wings. (ED, p. 277)

Even Jasper is perhaps not completely beyond all hope of redemption, and this is partly what distinguishes him, I think, from all other Dickensian devils. He was not born a devil, as one feels Fagin, Quilp, and even Rigaud must have been. He chose to become one, and so long as he remains alive there is always the possibility that he might choose to cease being one. The very first chapter of the novel concludes with a picture of the choir in their "sullied white robes" "scuttling" into the Cathedral while a voice intones, "WHEN THE WICKED MAN--" (ED, p. 4). The phrase, which receives additional emphasis from its typography, and which introduces one of the opening sentences for Evensong (Dickens incorrectly called it vespers; there is no such service in the Church of England) reads in full:[91]

> When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.[92]

The emphasis on the necessity of submission to law is important; this is precisely what Canon Crisparkle is teaching Neville. A true devil is by definition damned, and beyond the possibility of any redemption, but Thurley says if we "condemn Jasper out of hand as a villain"[93] we miss the point of the "real 'morality'" of Edwin Drood. Perhaps that famous death-cell scene of Jasper's which Dickens contemplated but never lived to write might have been intended to show us "the wicked man . . . saving his soul alive."

CONCLUSION

Dickens has often been regarded as a writer whose interests are primarily sociological, as a novelist who uses his very considerable gifts to champion specific contemporary issues or to plead for particular social reforms. One might, for instance, point to Oliver Twist with its scathing (if somewhat inaccurate) attack on the New Poor Law; Bleak House and its savage indictment of the whole Chancery system; Hard Times and its bitter criticism of both factory conditions and Utilitarian educational schemes; or Little Dorrit and its satirical portrait of the governmental bungling and inefficiency which led to the disasters of the Crimean war. Aside from the appearance of these specific issues as important themes in particular novels, one notes also a continuing interest in education (cf. Martin Chuzzlewit, Dombey and Son, David Copperfield, Bleak House, Great Expectations, Our Mutual Friend and Edwin Drood) as well, of course, as an abiding fascination with the whole field of crime and punishment, and prisons and prison-reform, as Philip Collins has demonstrated in his two major studies, Dickens and Crime and Dickens and Education.[1]

Dickens's concern with contemporary social issues is genuine and important, but at the heart of each of his novels, as this study has attempted to show, lies a profound concern with an even more central and fundamental issue; that is, the ultimate origin, nature and relationship of good and evil. Dickens's basic position at the outset of his career is best exemplified by Oliver Twist, a novel set, as Graham Greene remarks, within a Manichean world.[2] Greene, however, appears to imply that Dickens, for all his subsequent refinement of technique, never progresses intellectually much beyond the moral perceptions embodied in _Oliver_:

> . . . in this novel, _as in many of his later books_, [there] creeps in, unrecognized by the author, the eternal and alluring taint of the Manichee, with its simple and terrible explanation of our plight, how the world was made by Satan and not by God, lulling us with the music of despair.[3] [My italics]

My study of Dickens, however, has tried to show that the two moral poles of the Manichean formulation, the innocence of the child and the demonic malevolence of the villain, are constantly re-examined and redefined by Dickens in an orderly development throughout his whole career. I have also attempted to demonstrate that his final position in _Edwin Drood_ involves a careful and complete rejection of the premises of _Oliver Twist_.

Although all of Dickens's novels may be said to turn upon a basic conflict between good and evil in one form or another, _Oliver Twist_ presents that conflict in its simplest, most uncomplicated form. As Dickens sets the plot in motion which pits an utterly innocent child against an utterly demonic villain, he appears to have no doubts whatever concerning a number of significant points: the validity of childish innocence as a moral ideal, the wisdom of seeking to preserve that innocence indefinitely, the ability of this kind of innocence, as the embodiment of "the principle of Good," to triumph over evil, and the possibility of finding, in this world, Edenic gardens for the reception of the innocent.

In subsequent novels, however, Dickens not only presents the basic conflict in much more complex terms, he also becomes less and less certain about those things that in _Oliver Twist_ he simply took for granted. The innocence of his child-protagonists becomes increasingly ambiguous until finally, in David Copperfield, we see it clearly revealed as a combination of ignorance and egocentricity. The devils gradually become more and more respectable, as grotesque outsiders like Fagin and Quilp, representatives of a force which is clearly "other," are replaced by solid pillars of society like Mr. Pecksniff, Mr. Murdstone, Tulkinghorn, Bradley Headstone and John Jasper. Not only does the garden-world shrink until at last, in the late novels, it ceases to exist at all and we find ourselves wholly within the "fallen latitudes," but the garden itself is eventually recognized as a grave. Finally, in Edwin Drood, we are presented with child-like protagonists who must begin where Oliver left off, who must learn to reject the sterile safety of an unnaturally prolonged childhood and accept and endure the "gritty stages" of a fallen existence in order to acquire true humanity and maturity. We see, too, a villain who has become demonic precisely because he has rejected the trial and conflict of ordinary human existence and whose life in consequence becomes a perverse quest for sensation.

In the introduction to this thesis I contended that Dickens's whole career contained the record of his struggle to deal with that age-old philosophical conundrum, the problem of pain. His initial explanation, in spite of his determination to show "the principle of Good, surviving through every adverse circumstance and triumphing at last,"[4] is, as Graham Greene suggests, an essentially Manichean solution in that it posits two separate and opposed moral forces, represented by Oliver and Fagin, as two distinct, black and white realities. Although it is the later novels which are more usually described as "dark," Greene's contention that this vision is ultimately pessimistic is essentially correct. The world of the early novels must be judged to be inherently and irredeemably evil in that the paradisal gardens inhabited by the good are so obviously (in spite of their realistic place-names) part of a fantasy realm or wish-dream clearly beyond the actual.

Dickens's gradual recognition of the universality of the fall, which one begins to sense in novels like Bleak House and Little Dorrit, paradoxically provides a surer ground for ultimate optimism than the too-easy moral triumphs of his innocent heroes in the early works. All of the later novels, from Little Dorrit on, imply that if fallen man, in a spirit of humility, can learn to accept the limitations of his condition, abandon his quest for an impossible and spiritually damaging "innocence," repudiate death's dark allure as an escape from reality, and respond to his fellows with forgiveness, compassion and unselfish love, then some partial redemption at least can be obtained within the imperfect world of the here and now.

Early in the century, Carlyle noted that:

> A vain interminable controversy . . . touching what is at present called Origin of Evil, or some such thing, arises in every soul, since the beginning of the world; and in every soul, that would pass from idle Suffering into actual Endeavouring, must first be put an end to. The most, in our time, have to go content with a simple, incomplete enough Suppression of this controversy; to a few some Solution of it is indispensable.[5]

Dickens was one of those few to whom "some Solution [was] indispensable," and his solution is his whole life's work.

Footnotes--Introduction

[1] Edmund Wilson, "The Two Scrooges," in The Wound and the Bow (1941; rpt. London: Methuen, 1961), p. 7.

[2] Joseph Gold, Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1972), n., p. 64.

[3] C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (London: G. Bles, The Centenary Press, 1940).

[4] Barbara Hardy, The Moral Art of Charles Dickens (London: Athlone, 1970) and Joseph Gold, Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist.

[5] F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, Dickens the Novelist (1970; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), n., p. 186.

[6] Charles Dickens, "Preface" to Oliver Twist (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1841).

[7] George Edward Kennedy, The Anatomy of Redemption: The Religious and Moral Implications of The Novels of Charles Dickens, DA : 37: 582 A, 1976-77 argues for Dickens's "belief in a Manichaean division of the world into good and evil," a position this dissertation will reject.

Footnotes--Chapter I

[1] W. H. Auden, "Dingley Dell and the Fleet," in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (1948; rpt. New York: Random House, 1962), p, 408.

[2] Wilson, p. 2.

[3] Chesterton, p. 83.

[4] "Unsigned Review of *Pickwick Papers*, Nos. I-IX," *The Athenaeum*, 3 Dec. 1860, pp. 841-43; rpt. in Charles Dickens: *The Critical Heritage*, ed. Philip Collins (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 32.

[5] Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), I, 157.

[6] *Loc. cit*.

[7] Johnson, I, 164.

[8] Johnson, I, 165.

[9] Steven Marcus, *Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p. 17.

[10] Marcus, *Dickens*, p. 41.

[11] Sylvère Monod, *Dickens the Novelist* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1968), pp. 98-99.

[12] Monod, *Dickens the Novelist*, p. 100.

[13] Auden, p. 409.

[14] See Robert L. Patten, "The Interpolated Tales in *Pickwick Papers*," *Dickens Studies* 1 (May 1965), 86-89; William F. Axton, "Unity and Coherence in *The Pickwick Papers*," *Studies in English Literature: 1500-1900*, 5 (1965), 663-76; H. M. Levy, Jr. and William Ruff, "The Interpolated Tales in *Pickwick Papers*, a Further Note," *Dickens Studies*, 3 (Oct. 1967), 122-25; Robert L. Patten, "The Art of *Pickwick*'s Interpolated Tales," *ELH*, 34 (Sept. 1967), 349-66.

[15] James R. Kincaid, "The Education of Mr. Pickwick," *NCF*, 24 (Sept. 1969), 127-41.

[16] Kincaid, "The Education of Mr. Pickwick," p. 133.

[17] Kincaid, "The Education of Mr. Pickwick," p. 139.

[18] References throughout are to *The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953-62), 21 vols.

[19] See especially Hardy, *The Moral Art of Charles Dickens*.

[20] Christopher Herbert, "Converging Worlds in Pickwick Papers," NCF, 27 (June 1972), 16, comments that "a main point of the episode is lost . . . if we fail to see that our hero's actions here are once again rooted in vindictive anger."

[21] Philip Rogers, "Mr. Pickwick's Innocence," NCF, 27 (June 1972), 27.

[22] Kincaid, "The Education of Mr. Pickwick," p. 129.

[23] Marcus, Dickens, p. 38.

[24] Chesterton, p. 95.

[25] Auden, p. 419.

[26] John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens (London: Chapman and Hall, n.d.), p. 13.

[27] "Unsigned Review of Master Humphrey's Clock, Volume I," Athenaeum, 7 Nov. 1840, pp. 887-88; rpt. in The Critical Heritage, p. 95.

[28] Johnson, I, 273.

[29] Joseph Gold, "Dickens's Exemplary Aliens: Bumble the Beadle and Fagin the Fence," Mosaic, 2 (Fall 1968), 82.

[30] Gold, "Dickens's Exemplary Aliens," p. 84.

[31] Gold, "Dickens's Exemplary Aliens," p. 80.

[32] Loc. cit.

[33] Cf. Wilson, p. 14: "He identified himself readily with the thief, and even more readily with the murderer."

[34] Gold, "Dickens's Exemplary Aliens," p. 85.

[35] See Irving W. Kreutz, "Sly of Manner, Sharp of Tooth: A Study of Dickens's Villains," NCF, 22 (Mar. 1968), 331-48; Marie Hamilton Law, "The Indebtedness of Oliver Twist to Defoe's History of the Devil," PMLA, 40 (1925), 892-97; several articles by Lauriat Lane, Jr., including "The Devil in Oliver Twist," Dickensian, 52 (1956), 132-36; "Oliver Twist: a Revision," Times Lit. Sup., 20 July 1951, p. 460; "Dickens's Archetypal Jew," PMLA, 73 (1958), 94-100. See also Robert S. McLean, "Fagin: an Early View of Evil," The Lock Haven Review, 9 (1967), 29-36; Steven Marcus, "Who is Fagin?" Commentary, 34 (1962), rpt. in Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey, p. 93.

[36] Kathleen Tillotson, "Oliver Twist," Essays and Studies, 12 (1959), 93.

[37] Graham Greene, "The Young Dickens," in The Lost Childhood and

Other Essays (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1951); rpt. in Dickens: Modern Judgements, ed. A. E. Dyson (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 57.

[38] Loc. cit.

[39] Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel (1951; rpt. London: Hutchinson Univ. Library, 1961), I, 121.

[40] Kettle, English Novel, p. 123.

[41] See Joseph M. Duffy, Jr., "Another Version of Pastoral: Oliver Twist," ELH, 35 (Sept. 1968), 403-19.

[42] Gold, "Dickens's Exemplary Aliens," p. 89.

[43] J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels (1958; rpt. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1969), p. 83.

[44] My reasons for condemning this impulse as sentimental, and for distinguishing it from the traditional Christian anticipation of the after-life are dealt with more fully in the section of this thesis on The Old Curiosity Shop.

[45] Philippe Aries, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life (1962; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 38.

[46] Aries, p. 39.

[47] Aries, pp. 121-24.

[48] Aries, p. 114.

[49] Aries, p. 113.

[50] Peter Coveney, Poor Monkey (London: Rockliff, 1957), p. xi.

[51] Coveney, p. 116.

[52] Forster, p. 337.

[53] George H. Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel Criticism Since 1836 (1955; rpt. New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), p. 57.

[54] Hesketh Pearson, Dickens: His Character, Comedy and Career (New York: Harper, 1949), p. 86 and Jack Lindsay, Charles Dickens: A Biographical and Critical Study (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), pp. 199-201.

[55] Ford, Dickens and His Readers, p. 68.

[56] Coveney, p. 139.

[57] W. R. Greg, "Review of Stanley's Life," in Westminster Review,

42 (1844), p. 380, quoted by Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1957), p. 221.

[58] Matthew Arnold, "The Scholar Gipsy," ll. 203-205.

[59] Marcus, *Dickens*, p. 142.

[60] Johnson, I, 327.

[61] Rachel Bennett, "Punch *versus* Christian in *The Old Curiosity Shop*," *Review of English Studies*, 22 (1971), 427.

[62] Bennett, p. 423.

[63] Marcus, *Dickens*, p. 155.

[64] Michael Steig, "The Central Action of *The Old Curiosity Shop*: or Little Nell Revisited Again," *Literature and Psychology*, 15 (1965), 155.

[65] The difference between the Christian view and what Dickens is putting forward is best exemplified by the passage in *The Faerie Queene* (Book I, Canto X, Stanza 53) in which the Red Cross Knight, having had a vision of the New Jerusalem, is filled with longing to enter it, but is told by the holy hermit, Contemplation "that may not be." He must not turn his back on the world, but must work out his salvation within it. Nell's response to life is closer to the Red Cross Knight's error when "he satt downe to rest in middest of the race" (Book I, Canto VII, Stanza 5).

[66] Andrew Marvell, "On a Drop of Dew," ll. 5 and 16.

[67] Robert M. McCarron, "Folly and Wisdom: Three Dickensian Wise Fools," *DSA*, 6 (1977), 40-41, argues that Barnaby represents the traditional Wise Fool or Holy Innocent and claims that, as such, he "represents those forces of goodness and innocence needed to redeem the Chester-Gashford world." This argument, while correct in noting the element of the Holy Fool tradition in aspects of Barnaby's characterization, overlooks the moral ambiguity, which Marcus has remarked upon, in Barnaby's conduct.

[68] Johnson, I, 330.

[69] Harold E. Folland, "The Doer and the Deed: Theme and Pattern in *Barnaby Rudge*," *PMLA*, 74 (1959), 406.

[70] Marcus, *Dickens*, p. 192.

[71] Thomas J. Rice, "*Oliver Twist* and the Genesis of *Barnaby Rudge*," *Dickens Studies Newsletter*, 4 (Mar. 1973), 10.

[72] James K. Gottshall, "Devils Abroad: the Unity and Significance of *Barnaby Rudge*," *NCF*, 16 (Sept. 1961). See also Folland, Marcus and

A. E. Dyson.

[73] This notion has been pretty well laid to rest in recent times. See John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work (1957; rpt. London: Methuen, 1968), p. 77.

[74] Forster, p. 69.

[75] A. E. Dyson, "Barnaby Rudge: The Genesis of Violence," Critical Quarterly, 9 (1967), 137.

[76] The identification with George III is suggested, I submit, not only by the parallelism between England the the Maypole, with a corresponding identification between England's ruler and the Maypole's landlord, but also by the stress placed on old Willet's stubborn domination of his son. Cf. Thackeray's portrait of George III in The Four Georges and the English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century (London: Smith and Elder, 1888), p. 75: "He was the father of his people; his rebellious children must be flogged into obedience."

[77] John Milton, Paradise Lost, II, 1. 107.

[78] Paradise Lost, II, 11. 112-14.

[79] Paradise Lost, II, 11. 985-86.

[80] Gottshall, p. 141.

[81] Loc. cit.

Footnotes--Chapter II

[1] Forster, p. 140.

[2] Forster, p. 138.

[3] Forster, p. 141.

[4] George Gissing, The Immortal Dickens (1925; rpt. New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), p. 113.

[5] A. E. Dyson, "Martin Chuzzlewit: Howls the Sublime," Critical Quarterly, 9 (Autumn 1967), 235.

[6] Dyson, "Martin Chuzzlewit," p. 242.

[7] Dyson, "Martin Chuzzlewit," p. 237.

[8] Edwin B. Benjamin, "The Structure of Martin Chuzzlewit," Philological Quarterly, 34 (Jan. 1955), 45-46.

[9] Miller, Charles Dickens, pp. 98-142.

[10] Marcus, Dickens, pp. 225-39.

[11] Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Dickens World: The View from Todgers," Sewanee Review, 58 (1950), 419-31; rpt. George Ford and Lauriat Lane, The Dickens Critics (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 213-32.

[12] James R. Kincaid, Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 132-61.

[13] Joseph Gold, "Living in a Wale," DSA, 2 (1972), 150-62.

[14] Bert Hornback, Noah's Arkitecture (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 41-45.

[15] Barbara Hardy, "Martin Chuzzlewit," Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (1962; rpt. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 107.

[16] Marcus, Dickens, p. 255.

[17] Edmund Burke, "An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs," Edmund Burke: Selected Writings and Speeches, ed. Peter J. Stanlis (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), p. 543.

[18] Hardy, "Martin Chuzzlewit," p. 114.

[19] Hardy, "Martin Chuzzlewit," p. 113.

[20] He has, we are told, a "Satanic" moustache (MC, p. 44), and

describes himself as being as "proud as Lucifer" (MC, p. 47). Towards the end of the novel there is a suggestion of a demonic compact when Jonas, about to sign a contract with Tigg, inadvertently dips his pen in red ink and recoils with horror, thinking it to be blood (MC, p. 685).

[21] Stuart Curran ("The Lost Paradises of Martin Chuzzlewit," NCF, 25 [June 1970], 51-67) has nominated Pecksniff (p. 59) as "the most Satanic" of a cast of characters "profoundly Satanic" in an article which argues for a multiplicity of devil figures in the novel. Although Pecksniff's attempt to seduce Mary Graham in the garden does contain a number of references to snakes and toads, and to that extent recalls Satan's temptation of Eve, I do not find this set of images sufficiently developed to regard Pecksniff as a full-blown devil. I think it not unlikely that Dickens was inclined to fall back on imagery with demonic associations to describe villainous characters, but this is not enough in itself to argue that they therefore function as devil figures in the work.

[22] McCarron, p. 40.

[23] Geoffrey Russell, "Introduction," Martin Chuzzlewit (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), p. xii.

[24] Hardy, "Martin Chuzzlewit," p. 119.

[25] Loc. cit.

[26] Johnson, II, 643.

[27] Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), p. 157.

[28] Miller, Charles Dickens, p. 143.

[29] Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, p. 189.

[30] William Axton, "Tonal Unity in Dombey and Son," PMLA, 78 (Sept. 1963), 341-48.

[31] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 34.

[32] Robert Buchanan, "The 'Good Genie' of Fiction: Thoughts While Reading Forster's Life of Charles Dickens," St. Paul's Magazine, X (1872), pp. 130-48, rpt. in The Critical Heritage, p. 578.

[33] Forster, p. 146.

[34] Harry Stone, "The Novel as Fairy Tale: Dickens's Dombey and Son," English Studies, 47 (Feb. 1966), 1.

[35] Stone, "The Novel as Fairy Tale," p. 21.

[36] Stone, "The Novel as Fairy Tale," p. 27.

[37] Michael C. Kotzin, Dickens and the Fairy Tale (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1972), pp. 48-49.

[38] Cf. Ford, Dickens and His Readers, pp. 129-35, for a discussion of the attitudes of Victorian readers towards the imagination.

[39] Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, p. 171.

[40] Leavis, p. 131.

[41] Leavis, p. 49.

[42] Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, p. 175.

[43] The Faerie Queene, Book I, 1. 31.

[44] Frye, p. 33.

[45] Frye, p. 35.

[46] John Milton, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," ll. 205-20.

[47] "Nativity Ode," ll. 232-36.

[48] Johnson, II, 636.

[49] Frye, p. 148.

[50] The Faerie Queene, I:ii:11.

[51] Greene, p. 57.

[52] John Keats, "Ode on Melancholy," ll. 10-17.

[53] Julian Moynihan, "Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son: Firmness versus Wetness," Gross and Pearson, pp. 121-31.

[54] Gwendolyn B. Needham, "The Undisciplined Heart of David Copperfield," NCF, 9 (Sept. 1954), 81.

[55] Johnson, II, 698.

[56] Leavis, p. 76.

[57] The psychological function of the autobiography has been discussed by J. Hillis Miller in "Three Problems in Fictional Form: First Person Narration in David Copperfield and Huckleberry Finn," Experience in the Novel, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968), p. 34:

> "Going forward in time through a recapitulation in language of his experiences in the past, the narrator of a first-person novel

> returns eventually back through his past to himself in the present, but at a higher level of comprehension, it may be, than he had when he began to tell his story. The insight born of the act of retelling may lead the narrator to an authentic understanding of his life, a recognition of its hitherto hidden patterns."

William H. Marshall, "The Image of Steerforth and the Structure of David Copperfield," Tennessee Studies In Literature, 5 (1960), 57, makes a similar point. Noting that David's autobiography is meant for no eyes but David's, he contends that this "suggests that Dickens wished to construct a novel in which David as a character writes in order to understand himself and the significance of what has happened to him as a child and young man." Hornback, p. 80, discussing David's role as a novelist, argues that "What he is required to do is comprehend reality . . . David's destiny is the writing of David Copperfield." And John Lucas, The Melancholy Man: A Study of Dickens's Novels (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 168, calls the novel "Dickens's crucial enquiry into how a man comes to be what he is."

[58] Johnson, II, 678, sees David Copperfield as a work "of cardinal importance to the psychologist and the biographer."

[59] Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958; rpt. 1963).

[60] Erikson, p. 250.

[61] Erikson, p. 84.

[62] Erikson, p. 42.

[63] Erikson, p. 204.

[64] Geoffrey Thurley, The Dickens Myth: Its Genesis and Structure (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 137.

[65] Thurley, p. 139.

[66] Edward J. Shoben, "Towards a Concept of the Normal Personality," The American Psychologist, 12 (1959), 186-88.

[67] Kincaid, Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter, pp. 162-63, argues that David begins in a state of innocence and falls as a result of Murdstone's intervention. Kincaid, however, seems to mean by "innocence" the same kind of instinctive sanctity exhibited by Oliver and Nell. The "innocence," however, which David manifests at the beginning of the novel, although it can be (and usually is) expressed by the same pastoral metaphor as that used for the theological concept of the unfallen, seems to me to be little more than infantile egocentricity.

[68] One notes that the world David inhabits from now on until he reaches Dover exhibits progressive marks of deterioration and decay. The schoolroom at Creakle's Academy is, according to David

> "the most forlorn and desolate place I had ever seen. . . . Scraps of old copy-books and exercises litter the dirty floor. Some silkworms's houses, made of the same material, are scattered over the desk. Two miserable little white mice, left behind by their owner, are running up and down in a fusty castle made of pasteboard and wire, looking in all the corners with their red eyes for something to eat. A bird, in a cage very little bigger than himself, makes a mournful rattle now and then in hopping on his perch . . . but neither sings nor chirps. There is a strange unwholesome smell upon the room, like mildewed corduroys, sweet apples wanting air, and rotten books. There could not well be more ink splashed about it, if it had been roofless from its first construction, and the skies had rained, snowed, hailed and blown ink through the varying seasons of the year." (DC, p. 78)

These qualities are even more strongly stressed in the description of Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse:

> "It was a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the tide was in, and on the mud when the tide was out, and literally overrun with rats. Its panelled rooms discoloured with the dirt and smoke of a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant." (DC, p. 154)

[69] Kincaid, The Rhetoric of Laughter, although he does not link the episode specifically with the question of identity, also notes the dehumanization of David in this passage, p. 174.

[70] Erikson, p. 252.

[71] Monod, p. 301, notes the changing names, but regards them as "a device which enhances the difference in the nature of the relationship involved.

[72] Kincaid, The Rhetoric of Laughter, p. 163, describes David as being haunted by his sense of the loss of Eden.

[73] Leavis, p. 136.

[74] The point has been noted by Ford, p. 352, and the Leavises, p. 85.

[75] As the Leavises point out, p. 85, the resemblance is further emphasized by the fact that Miss Murdstone acts as "jailer" to both Dora and Clara.

[76] Monod, p. 318, notes the resemblance between David and Murdstone, but thinks that Dickens himself is unaware of the likeness.

[77] Marshall, p. 59, agrees that Steerforth serves a psychological function for David but sees him primarily as "a kind of positive father-image." I suggest that his role includes something like this,

but is ultimately far more complex than Marshall allows.

[78] Marshall, for instance, p. 60, suggests that David's "problem concerns the continuity and significance of the Self, of which the image of Steerforth is a part."

[79] Edmund Wilson, p. 58.

[80] L. A. G. Strong, "David Copperfield," Dickensian, 46 (March 1950), 70.

[81] Maximilian Rudwin, The Devil in Legend and Literature (Chicago, London: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1931), pp. 47-48, notes that "The Devil is usually figured in a lean form. His hands are long and lean. His face is generally as pale and yellow as the wax of an old candle. . . . his hair, as well as his beard is usually of a flaming red colour."

[82] Vereen Bell, "The Emotional Matrix of David Copperfield," Studies in English Literature: 1500-1900, 8 (1968), 638, argues that in David Copperfield, Dickens "turned his back upon Dingley Dell." As I have argued, however, his repudiation is only partial and never fully completed in this novel.

[83] Lucas, p. 169, noting that the Prelude was published in the same year as David Copperfield suggests that it is "possible that Dickens read and made use of Wordsworth's poem."

[84] It is perhaps worth noticing that the name of Oliver Twist's mother is also Agnes, a detail which suggests a link between the two "way-worn" boys and their ultimate fates.

Footnotes--Chapter III

[1] Pairs of devils appeared earlier, most notably in Barnaby Rudge, but Carker and Bagstock, Heep and Steerforth can also be seen as demonic pairings.

[2] Laurence Frank, "'Through a Glass Darkly': Esther Summerson and Bleak House," DSA, 4 (1975), 99.

[3] Robert A. Donovan, "Structure and Idea in Bleak House," The Shaping Vision (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1966), p. 209.

[4] Leavis, n., p. 186.

[5] Hornback, p. 100.

[6] Christopher Marlowe, The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, Act V., Sc. iii.

[7] "One of the central themes of demonic imagery is parody, the mocking of the exuberant play of art by suggesting its imitation in terms of 'real life.'" Frye, p. 147.

[8] Leonard W. Deen, "Style and Unity in Bleak House," Criticism, 3 (Summer 1961), 209.

[9] Robert Barnard, Imagery and Theme in the Novels of Charles Dickens (New York: Humanities Press, 1974), p. 63.

[10] See, for example, Barbara Hardy, "Work in Progress IV: Food and Ceremony in Great Expectations," Essays in Criticism, 13 (October 1963), rpt. in The Moral Art of Dickens, pp. 139-55.

[11] Joseph I. Fradkin, "Will and Society in Bleak House," PMLA, 81 (March 1966), 101.

[12] Mrs. Leavis identifies the birds as souls (p. 180). For a more detailed analysis of the bird symbolism see Cynthia Dettelbach, "Bird Imagery in Bleak House," Dickensian, 59 (Sept. 1963), 177-81.

[13] Fradkin, p. 101. He describes Krook's cellar and its sacks of women's hair as "a place in which life and beauty are imprisoned, converted into commodities."

[14] Frye, pp. 187-88.

[15] Frye, p. 188.

[16] There has been considerable critical controversy over the matter of Tulkinghorn's "motiveless malignity." Johnson, II, 765, speaks of the "almost purposeless malignance with which Mr. Tulkinghorn pursues Lady Dedlock," and identifies this as one of the flaws in the novel. Eugene F. Quirk ("Tulkinghorn's Buried Life: A Study of Character in

Bleak House," JEGP, 72 [1973], 534) suggests that part of Tulkinghorn's motivation may be found in the possibility that he overhears Sir Leicester's patronizing comments (BH, p. 535), while Fradkin (p. 103) suggests that the motive is sexual.

[17] See Genesis 3:15. God says to the serpent, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed."

[18] Vholes' identification with Death is suggested by Louis Crompton, "Satire and Symbolism in Bleak House," NCF, 12 (March 1958), 299.

[19] Paradise Lost, II. 846-47.

[20] Mrs. Leavis (p. 211) has drawn attention to the importance of Skimpole's portrait in Bleak House: "This is a significant departure for Dickens, to whom the image of the child has hitherto been a necessary conception and the child's sensibility that records criticism of the adult world a necessary technical mode."

[21] "The dreadful parody of the pastoral dream" has been discussed by Barnard, p. 68.

[22] Alice Van Buren Kelley, "The Bleak Houses of Bleak House," NCF, 25 (Dec. 1970), 252-68.

[23] Crompton, p. 290.

[24] Michael Steig and F. A. C. Wilson, "Hortense vs Bucket: The Ambiguity of Order in Bleak House," MLQ, 33 (Sept. 1972), 289.

[25] James Augustine Stothert, "Living Novelists," The Rambler, ns 1 (Jan. 1854), 41-51; rpt. in The Critical Heritage, p. 295.

[26] Deen, p. 215.

[27] William Axton, "The Trouble with Esther," MLQ, 26 (Dec. 1965), 545.

[28] James H. Broderick and John E. Grant, "The Identity of Esther Summerson," Modern Philology, 55 (May 1958), 252-58.

[29] Leavis, pp. 212-15.

[30] Alex Zwerdling, "Esther Summerson Rehabilitated," PMLA, 88 (May 1973), 427-39.

[31] Frank, "Through a Glass Darkly," pp. 91-112.

[32] George Orwell, The Decline of the English Murder and Other Essays (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 139.

[33] Among those who have discussed Esther's regenerative role in

considerable detail are Miller, Charles Dickens, pp. 210-15; Crompton, pp. 288-89; and Richard J. Dunn, "Esther's Role in Bleak House," Dickensian, 62 (Sept. 1966), 163-66.

[34] Erikson, p. 84.

[35] Hornback, for instance, p. 92 says "her often saccharine goodness is a bothersome indication of the still sentimental and romantic side of [Dickens's] vision."

[36] Axton, "The Trouble with Esther," p. 554.

[37] William Axton, "Esther's Nicknames: A Study in Relevance," Dickensian, 62 (Sept. 1966), pp. 159-60.

[38] Broderick and Grant, p. 155, and Zwerdling, p. 438, have both suggested that Ada represents Esther's alter ego. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that Erikson, p. 249, identifies projection as "among our deepest and most dangerous defence mechanisms."

[39] Zwerdling, p. 434.

[40] Frank, "Through a Glass Darkly," p. 93: "She seeks to bury the past as she buried the doll which was her only real companion in her childhood."

[41] Frank, "Through A Glass Darkly," p. 99, suggests that both Lady Dedlock and Hortense are psychological doubles for Esther.

[42] Further commentary on Esther's dream can be found in Ian Ousby, "The Broken Glass: Vision and Comprehension in Bleak House," NCF, 29 (March 1975), 390-91.

[43] Crawford Kilian, "In Defence of Esther Summerson," Dalhousie Review, 54 (1974-75), 325, also sees evidence in this speech of "bitterness, break[ing] through the veneer of 'duty.'"

[44] Hornback, p. 89. Although he does not specifically link the idea with Esther's journey, Hornback makes a similar point when he says that the theme of Bleak House shows us that "we cannot recreate Eden . . . we cannot escape and be saved on Noah's Ark."

[45] Examples of the quester and his guide can be found in the figures of Dante and Virgil in The Divine Comedy, and in The Faerie Queene in Red Cross and Una, Sir Guyon and the Palmer.

[46] Deen, p. 207.

[47] Miller, Charles Dickens, pp. 175-76.

[48] Frank, "Through A Glass Darkly," p. 107.

[49] Frank, "Through A Glass Darkly," p. 111.

[50] Zwerdling, p. 438.

[51] *Loc. cit.*

[52] Miller, *Charles Dickens*, p. 223.

[53] *Loc. cit.*

[54] Annie G. M. Smith, "The Ironmaster in *Bleak House*," *Essays in Criticism*, 21 (April 1971), 159.

[55] Trevor Blount, "The Ironmaster and the New Acquisitiveness: Dickens's views on the rising industrial classes as exemplified in *Bleak House*," *Essays in Criticism*, 15 (Oct. 1965), 420-21.

[56] Leavis, pp. 200-201.

[57] Zwerdling, p. 438.

[58] Miller, *Charles Dickens*, p. 163.

[59] Leavis, p. 242.

Footnotes--Chapter IV

[1] Fradkin, p. 109.

[2] Early reviewers of Little Dorrit who were not simply hostile tended to be most struck by the prevailing note of sadness in the novel. For an account of early reactions to the work, see Ford, Dickens and His Readers, pp. 100-101. Among modern critics, Barnard, Imagery and Theme, p. 548, describes the book as one "written in a mood of depression and disappointment." Hornback, p. 109, notes the sadness, but denies that the novel is ultimately pessimistic.

[3] The image of the prison in Little Dorrit has been exhaustively dealt with by Wilson, pp. 47-49; Johnson, II, 884; Miller, Charles Dickens, pp. 227-32; John Wain, "Little Dorrit," Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (1962; rpt. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 175.

[4] Miller, Charles Dickens, p. 232, also deals with the image of the labyrinth.

[5] The imagery of hell in the novel has been discussed by R. D. McMaster, "Introduction," Little Dorrit (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969), p. x.

[6] The importance of the concept of the fall in Little Dorrit has been touched on by Hornback, p. 100, who calls the novel "insistently post-lapsarian."

[7] Wilson, p. 50, suggests that Rigaud is intended to be seen as a caricature of Napoleon III, while Harvey Peter Sucksmith, "The Melodramatic Villain in Little Dorrit," Dickensian, 71 (1975), pp. 76-83, presents persuasive evidence that the figure of Rigaud is based upon the character of the notorious French poisoner, Pierre-François Lacenaire (1800-36). Most criticism of Rigaud, however, focuses upon his demonic identity. See, for example, Lionel Trilling, "Little Dorrit," Ford, The Dickens Critics, p. 285. One might also mention, in connection with Rigaud's devil-identity, the symbolic significance of the placing of his first appearance in the novel immediately following the opening description of hell.

[8] One must add, however, that Rigaud enjoys the assistance of at least one minor devil in the person of Jeremiah Flintwich.

[9] Trilling's article explicitly makes the Lear connection, p. 285. Echoes of King Lear are fairly strong throughout the novel, and have been discussed in some detail by Jerome Meckier, "Dickens and King Lear: A Myth for Victorian England," South Atlantic Quarterly, 71 (1972), 75-90.

[10] Daniel Defoe, The History of the Devil (1972; rpt. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), p. 318.

[11] Loc. cit.

[12] Defoe, p. 575.

[13] Philip Collins, Dickens and Crime (1962; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 83-84.

[14] Paradise Lost, I, 107.

[15] Paradise Lost, II, 1054.

[16] Alexander Welsh, The City of Dickens (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 135, goes so far as to suggest that Rigaud functions, like Orlick, as the hero's double.

[17] Stanley Tick, "The Sad End of Mr. Meagles," DSA, 3 (1974), 87-99, argues against this interpretation in defence of Mr. Meagles's innocence, but Trilling, pp. 284-85, is, to my mind, much more convincing. Additional evidence in defence of Trilling's position is cited by Kincaid, The Rhetoric of Laughter, pp. 214-15.

[18] Trilling, p. 287, a discussion of "the great modern strategy of being the insulted and injured."

[19] Francis Bacon, "Of Truth," The Essayes or Counsels, 1625, in Francis Bacon: A Selection of His Works, ed. Sidney Warhaft (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965), p. 47.

[20] The identification made between evil and the theatrical is perhaps surprising in view of Dickens's life-long passion for the theatre. In this novel, however, I think that Dickens submerges his own personal attitudes for the sake of an obvious and convenient metaphor in much the same way that Jane Austen, who was herself fond of private theatricals, uses the staging of the play at Mansfield Park during the absence of Sir Thomas to express the subversive influence of the Crawfords.

[21] Barnard, p. 99, describes the world of the novel as "a savage place where false and hideous gods are worshipped," but does not make the explicit identification between Mr. Merdle and the false messiah.

[22] William Burgan, "Little Dorrit in Italy," NCF, 29 (March 1975), 393-411, deals with the illusory nature of the Dorrits' Italian experiences.

[23] Auden, p. 410.

[24] Angus Easson, "John Chivery and the Wounded Strephon: A Pastoral Element in Little Dorrit," Durham University Journal, NS 36 (1974-75), p. 166, notes that for Dickens, the "pastoral is indicative of self-deception."

[25] John Stuart Mill, "Bentham," Mill on Bentham and Coleridge, ed. F. R. Leavis (1950; rpt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), p. 62.

[26] Kincaid, The Rhetoric of Laughter, p. 199, rejects the identification of Doyce with the artist.

[27] Mr. Dorrit, of course, not only plays the helpless child to perfection; when it suits him he can also assume the persona of the venerable old man--as he does when he appeals to Little Dorrit as her old father (LD, p. 228). Patriarchal Casby is probably the best example of the way in which the appearance of benevolent and wise old age can be exploited, and Dickens's characterization of him is probably connected with the theme of illusion in the novel. In addition, I think it also says something about the profound unnaturalness of the kind of world the novel explores. Casby, who even in childhood looked like an old man, to some extent recalls Grandmother Smallweed in Bleak House. She is a much more obviously grotesque and demonic figure, but one could say of Casby, as Dickens does of Mrs. Smallweed, that he "had never been a child."

[28] The Faerie Queene, I, 3, ix.

[29] Leavis, p. 298.

[30] Richard Hughes, High Wind in Jamaica (New York: Modern Library, 1932).

[31] Little Dorrit's Christ-like identity is suggested by a provocative comment on her role by Trilling, p. 293. He calls her "the Beatrice of the Comedy, the Paraclete in female form." Ronald S. Librach in "The Burdens of Self and Society: Release and Redemption in Little Dorrit," Studies in the Novel, 7 (Winter 1975), 548, sees her as a redemptive madonna figure, while Edward Heatley in "The Redeemed Feminine of Little Dorrit," DSA, 4 (1975), 155, prefaces his Jungian analysis of the novel with a discussion of its religious symbolism and identifies Little Dorrit with "the Galilean covenant of gentleness and compassion." Eliot L. Gilbert, "The Ceremony of Innocence: Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol," PMLA, 24, also argues that real or "metaphysical" innocence, as distinguished from "stubborn and calculated naivete," which he associates with Pickwick, Tom Pinch and "the curious Victorian sexual innocence" exhibited by Little Nell and Esther Summerson, is "a positive, not a negative quality." His argument differs from mine, however, in that he sees "real" innocence as something ultimately recoverable by fallen men like Scrooge, a quality which can "retain its original strength behind the gathering clouds of experience," whereas I see it as the unique innocence of the Christ figure.

[32] John Milton, Areopagitica, ed. K. H. Lea (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 14-15.

[33] Areopagitica, p. 15.

[34] Librach, pp. 548-49.

[35] Rupert R. Roopnaraine, "Time and the Circle in Little Dorrit,"

DSA, 3 (1974), 75.

[36] Hornback, p. 86, commenting on Jo's death, for example, describes "the powerful irony of Jo's death," and claims that when Jo repeats "Our Father," he is not praying to God but to Allan Woodcourt, and that the light the boy looks for is a "natural, not supernatural light."

[37] Auden, p. 410.

[38] Auden, p. 409.

[39] Loc. cit.

[40] Auden, p. 410.

[41] Welsh, p. 113, argues that this is Dickens's code also: "the way to correct a wrong is to make reparation for it, to pay for it as nearly as possible in like coin." This is the creed in which Clennam was raised and to which he subscribes for the greater part of the novel, but surely the whole purpose of his imprisonment, and especially his utter helplessness under those conditions, is to show him the futility of such a ledger-book outlook.

[42] Heatley, p. 155.

[43] Although Stanley Cooperman, "Dickens and the Secular Blasphemy: Social Criticism in Hard Times, Little Dorrit and Bleak House," College English, 22 (Dec. 1960), 158-59, appears to believe that Dickens sees crimes against property as the greatest offence, and to be less concerned with "individual than with government evil," Hornback, p. 110, seems to me to be much nearer the mark in his statement that what Dickens attacks "is the desperate and unloving world we have made for ourselves in the name of society . . . what he champions is the possibility of reclaiming this world and reordering our lives individually--one by one and two by two--through love."

[44] T. N. Grove, "The Psychological Prison of Arthur Clennam in Dickens's Little Dorrit," Modern Language Review, 68 (Oct. 1973), 755, notes that the church in which Amy and Arthur are married is St. George's.

[45] Paradise Lost, X, 1083-84.

Footnotes--Chapter V

[1] Philip Collins, "A Tale of Two Novels," DSA, 2 (1972), 345-46.

[2] Collins, "A Tale of Two Novels," p. 346.

[3] Loc. cit.

[4] Collins, "A Tale of Two Novels," p. 347.

[5] Johnson, II, 979.

[6] Philip Hobsbaum, A Reader's Guide to Charles Dickens (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p. 214, argues that A Tale of Two Cities "has no organic relation with Dickens's other works," and that "there would be a good case for relegating [it] . . . to an appendix" (p. 213). John Gross, "A Tale of Two Cities," Gross and Pearson, p. 195, calls the novel "a thin and uncharacteristic work," while Miller, Charles Dickens, pp. 247-48, dismisses it in a couple of paragraphs. Sylvère Monod, "Some Stylistic Devices in A Tale of Two Cities," Dickens the Craftsman: Strategies of Presentation, ed. Robert Partlow, Jr. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1970), p. 165, defends the greatness of the writing, but concedes that one may "intensely" dislike many aspects of the work.

[7] Many critics, including those cited above, have included among the novel's flaws their perception of a deep ambivalence in the attitude of the narrator, and some, like Lindsay, Charles Dickens, p. 360, have attributed this to Dickens's personal conflicts at the outset of his affair with Ellen Ternan. Thurley, however, p. 258, regards the ambiguities as a virtue, a device by which Dickens marries the public and private themes.

[8] Johnson, II, 981-82 says essentially the same thing when he argues that "the two themes of love and revolution are not successfully fused." He adds, "Dickens tried to portray the French Revolution as the inevitable fruit of seed that had been sowed over many long generations, as the harvest of the past . . . And he tried to make Carton's sacrifice both an expiation and a victory . . . But in the process, instead of merging, the truth of revolution and the truth of sacrifice are made to appear in conflict."

[9] Gross, p. 187, noting that, as John Forster records, Dickens originally intended to call the novel Buried Alive, comments that "at its heart lie images of death."

[10] Auden, p. 410.

[11] Lucie's garden may be dismissed as an Eden-like retreat for at least two reasons. Not only is it inadequate to preserve Darnay from the pull of "the loadstone rock," even Lucie herself must ultimately leave it to face the terror of revolutionary France. The only other garden mentioned in the novel is, interestingly enough, the "garden-tomb"

of Lucie's dead son (TTC, p. 301).

[12] Gross, p. 191, describes Carton as a man "drained of the will to live . . . courting death, and embracing it when it comes."

[13] Hobsbaum, p. 214.

[14] Gross, p. 187, calls this "the febblest of resurrections."

[15] Johnson, II, 980.

[16] George Wing, Dickens (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), p. 70.

[17] Robert Alter, "The Demons of History in Dickens's Tale," Novel, 2 (1969), 139, sees her as "the champion of Darkness" in her final conflict with Miss Pross, but Thurley, p. 273, more accurately identifies her as one of the Fates.

[18] Paradise Lost, II, 511.

[19] Thurley, p. 263.

[20] Alter, p. 138.

[21] Thurley, pp. 259-60, notes "a series of interlocking equivocations, ambiguities and ambivalences."

[22] Cf. Miller, Charles Dickens, p. 248.

[23] Richard J. Dunn, "Far, Far Better Things: Dickens's Later Endings," DSA, 7 (1978), 230-31, describes the final chapter which depicts Carton's death as "one of Dickens's most easily misunderstood final chapters." Dunn points out that Carton's famous last words are never actually uttered, but are really only the narrator's conjecture. "Thus, for all its Christian overtones and pathos, A Tale of Two Cities' conclusion remains one of Dickens's most honest. It does not violate the integrity of characterization to enforce a moral point." Dunn's point is well-taken, but ultimately, however, reinforces one's impressions of Dickens's underlying ambiguity in this novel.

[24] It is not only in the opening descriptions that one finds evidence of the winter world. William Burgan, "Tokens of Winter in Dickens's Pastoral Settings," Modern Language Quarterly, 36 (1975), 315 notes the presence of "threatening realities," often harbingers of death or winter, in even the most apparently serene pastoral settings in the late novels.

[25] Dickens himself was so conscious of this that, as Forster records, he was careful to reread Copperfield before beginning Great Expectations in order to avoid unconscious repetition. (Forster, p. 369.) In spite of that, some critics have perceived strong resemblances between the two works. E. Pearlman, for instance, ("Inversion in Great Expectations," DSA, 7 [1978]), 191), sees Great Expectations as a clear

inversion of Copperfield. David, for example, goes from "little gentleman" to "little labouring hind," a process Pip reverses. Among other inverted parallels Pearlman notes that David's child-like mother is represented by a masculine figure (Joe) for Pip, while the sex of the tyrant-parent is similarly reversed. Stanley Tick, "Towards Jaggers," DSA, 5 (1976), 134, sees Great Expectations and David Copperfield as twin expressions of what Tick calls "the theme of secrecy," and identifies as Dickens's attempt to come to terms with personal guilt occasioned by his deliberate suppression of the blacking warehouse incident.

[26] William F. Axton, "Great Expectations Yet Again," DSA, 2 (1972), 278, denies that the novel has any "primary concern with questions bearing on man's fundamental goodness or evil, his complicity in crime or in some system of inherited guilt, or his participation in cosmic justice or injustice. On the contrary . . . the novel is not so much addressed to ultimate metaphysics or theological matters as to moral and social attitudes and institutions and the psychological mechanisms by means of which individuals and indeed an entire society manage to evade acknowledging responsibility for their own wrong doings and their implications in that of others." While I would concur with Axton's underlying assumption that the novel is not concerned with transcendental realities ("ultimate metaphysics"), I would add that a concern with "man's fundamental goodness or evil, his complicity in crime or in some system of inherited guilt" is not incompatible with an equal interest in "moral and social attitudes;" that in fact, some assumptions concerning the former are probably necessary for the formation of judgements concerning the latter.

[27] Both Mélanie Young "Distorted Expectations," DSA, 7 (1978), and G. Robert Stange, "Expectations Well Lost or Dickens's Fable for His Time," College English, 16 (1954-55) assume that Pip exists in a state of innocence at the novel's outset. Stange, p. 9, dating Pip's "fall" from the middle part of his career argues that "we see the boy first in his natural condition in the country, responding and acting instinctively and therefore virtuously." Ms. Young, p. 204, argues that Pip falls from grace only as he acquires language. Rosalee Robinson, "The Several Worlds of Great Expectations," Queen's Quarterly, 78 (1971), 58, describes the forge as an innocent or pastoral world and locates Pip's fall in his departure from this Edenic region. John R. Wilson, "Dickens and the Christian Mystery," South Atlantic Quarterly, 73 (1974), 534, arguing that Great Expectations "more than any other of Dickens's novels . . . parallels the traditional myth of the Fall," nevertheless asserts that "in the first part we see Pip as the innocent young child living in the Edenlike naturalness of the country--acting instinctively." It would be difficult, I think, to find a less Edenic world than the graveyard in which Pip finds himself as the novel opens. When he flees from that in terror to seek refuge at the Forge, he finds no sanctuary, but his tyrannical sister on the rampage, armed with Tickler. Hornback's comments, p. 125, seems to me to describe the world of the novel's opening chapters far more accurately: "From the beginning of Great Expectations we know that this is an imperfect world."

[28] John P. McWilliams, Jr., "Great Expectations: The Beacon, the Gibbet and the Ship," DSA, 2 (1972), 255-66, has made a careful study of the interweaving patterns of beacon, gibbet and ship, although his argument is vitiated to some extent by his confusion of beacon and lighthouse (p. 257).

[29] Ian Ousby, "Language and Gesture in Great Expectations," Modern Language Review, 72 (1977), 787, notes that the novel contains a number of references to the Book of Common Prayer.

[30] An exception might be Sissy Jupes in Hard Times. Geoffrey Johnston Saddock, however, in an article disputing the position of the Leavises, ("Dickens and Dr. Leavis: A Critical Commentary on Hard Times," DSA, 2 [1972], 211), sees Sissy as a throwback to Little Nell: ". . . in fact, her uncomplaining fortitude, faith, forgiveness and ready self-sacrifice identify her as a character whose conception and purpose were taken from the same mould."

[31] The other children are, of course, Trabb's boy, Herbert Pocket, and the Avenger, none of whom strike me as exemplars of innocence.

[32] The ladder and its variant, the stairs, constitute an important image pattern in Great Expectations. In every case in which these images appear, they are associated with darkness, destructive light, or a threat of some sort.

[33] Wemmick's castle in Walworth is, of course, the locus classicus of the attempt to safeguard selfless love by relegating it to a special, sealed-off compartment of one's life; cf. Lawrence Jay Dessner, "Great Expectations: The Tragic Comedy of John Wemmick," Ariel, 6 (1975), 65-80.

[34] Miller, Charles Dickens, p. 254, comments that "the only possible relationship to other people [in the world of Great Expectations] seems to be that of oppressor to oppressed or oppressed to oppressor."

[35] Harry Stone, "Fire, Hand and Gate," Kenyon Review, 24 (1972), 669 calls Orlick "a Satan-like image of evil." Tick, "Towards Jaggers," p. 142, argues that Orlick is "not really diabolical. Orlick and Joe Gargery represent the high and low points of human potential; their natures circumscribe the range of behavior we are called upon to judge in Great Expectations."

[36] Julian Moynahan, "The Hero's Guilt: The Case of Great Expectations," Essays in Criticism, 10 (1960), 60-79.

[37] Moynahan, p. 72.

[38] Moynahan, p. 73.

[39] Miller, Charles Dickens, p. 276.

[40] Elizabeth McAndrew, "A Second Level of Symbolism in Great

Expectations," *Essays in Literature, Western Illinois University*, 2 (1975), 72. Ms. McAndrew notes that "three times he [Pip] is faced with an expiatory ordeal by fire."

[41] Moynahan, p. 76, also detects a note of falseness in Pip's avowals of forgiveness.

[42] Joseph A. Hynes, "Image and Symbol in *Great Expectations*," *ELH*, 30 (1963), 286, discusses fire imagery in the novel but sees it primarily as a positive symbol of life and light (he excepts candle-light). He interprets the flames which burn Miss Havisham as symbolic purification (p. 289).

[43] Ousby, pp. 789-93, discusses gestures as the language of the heart, which in *Great Expectations* tends to be opposed by words, the instrument of tyranny. His identification of an opposition between the two would seem to support my contention that Pip's kiss betokens genuine forgiveness while his words do not.

[44] Johnson, II, 993-94.

[45] Hornback, p. 135, says of Joe: "[He] is good, but his goodness is natural rather than preternatural, and honest rather than pious," cf. also Tick, p. 142.

[46] Thurley, p. 283.

[47] John Carey, *The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens's Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 14.

[48] Young, p. 217, connects Joe with this tradition when she remarks, "As blacksmith, Joe works with hard, natural elements; he forges and tempers stubborn metals into usable shapes. This tempering process is analogous to the effect of Christian love on the harder, darker side of human nature, for it shapes the 'natural heart' into a better form (man's 'right nature') without making it unrecognizable (as Miss Havisham's twisted heart)."

[49] Edgar Rosenberg, "A Preface to *Great Expectations*: The Pale Usher Dusts His Lexicons," *DSA*, 2 (1973), 302, has uncovered evidence which suggests Dickens's familiarity with this tradition in Chapter IV of *A Child's History of England*, where Dickens discusses the legend of St. Dunstan and his adventures, as a blacksmith, with devils.

[50] Fire imagery has been analysed in some detail by Stange, p. 13; Stone, p. 673; Hynes, whose comments I have already noted; and B. J. Fisher and J. Turow, "Dickens and Fire Imagery," *Revue des Langues Vivantes*, 40 (1974), 364. The most thorough treatment of fire imagery, and one which deals with its destructive, as well as its positive significance, is contained in an article by Paulette Michel-Michot, "The Fire Motif in *Great Expectations*," *Ariel*, 8 (1977), 49-69.

[51] Johnson, II, 1043, calls Our Mutual Friend "the darkest and bitterest of all Dickens's novels."

[52] A number of critics have commented upon the similarities between Eliot's The Wasteland and the world that Dickens depicts in Our Mutual Friend: cf. Johnson, II, 1043; Lionel Trilling, A Gathering of Fugitives (Boston: Secker and Warburg, 1956), pp. 42-43; H. M. Daleski, Dickens and the Art of Analogy (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), p. 278.

[53] Thurley, p. 326, in keeping with the identification of the world of the novel as the realm of death, remarks that "From the first page of the book, The Thames has been Styx, Hexam Charon."

[54] Barbara Hardy, "Work in Progress IV: Food and Ceremony in Great Expectations," Essays in Criticism, 13 (1963), 351-63, rpt. The Moral Art of Dickens, pp. 139-55.

[55] U. C. Knoepflmacher, Laughter and Despair: Readings in Ten Novels of the Victorian Era (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: Univ. of California Press, 1971), p. 143, discussing Dickens's technique in Our Mutual Friend, which he describes as "a double process of decomposition and cohesion" (p. 137), attributes the "dire reversals" of the work (of which the depiction of death as life is one) to Dickens's desire "to persuade the reader that the real is unreal and that the unreal is real" in order "to condition us to accept the illusory fairy tale he offers as a substitute for our belief in the reality principle." The argument is ingenious, but I would contend that the depiction of the death-like world of Our Mutual Friend is not just a technical device employed to make us accept Boffin more readily, but an important thematic statement about the moral identity of the world of the novel.

[56] William R. Harvey, "Charles Dickens and the Byronic Hero," NCF, 24 (1969-70), 314, identifies Wrayburn (along with Dick Swiveller, Cousin Feenix and Steerforth) as an example of Dickens's version of the Byronic hero, adding that Eugene "like Sidney Carton . . . is only mildly sinful." This comment, in the light of Wrayburn's sadistic tormenting of Bradley Headstone, his bribery of Mr. Dolls (which leads to the latter's death), and his efforts to seduce Lizzie Hexam, seems to me to be a colossal understatement.

[57] William J. Palmer, "The Movement of History in Our Mutual Friend," PMLA, 89 (1974), 492, calls Harmon's decision "a symbolic kind of suicide."

[58] Jenny's vision has been frequently interpreted as a Blakean vision of innocence. Garrett Stewart, "The Golden Bower of Our Mutual Friend," ELH, 40 (1973), 118-22, rpt. in Dickens and the Trials of Imagination (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974), calls her visions of dead children "a descent of grace" and the roof garden "a limited opening upon transcendence." Thurley, p. 326, interprets Jenny's vision, and her cry "come up and be dead" as "die to this life--this

scramble for money, position, prestige, in order to arise to another, better." Daleski's interpretation, p. 299, is similar. C. W. Kennedy, "Naming and Language in Our Mutual Friend," NCF, 28 (1973-74), 173 talks of Jenny's "Edenic" world. Palmer, p. 491, does not deny the Blakean overtones of the two passages, but sees them, as I do, as representative of a temptation which Jenny must eventually resist: "In the Dickens world, two types of salvation are possible: free entrance into heaven for the dead child or earthly salvation for the child who grows to feel and think as an adult and who becomes fully human by making moral decisions and expressing his or her own reality in the adult world. Jenny Wren sees these two different visions of future history and must choose the type of salvation she wants." He concludes (p. 491), that "her Blakean vision is one of despair and escape."

[59] Arnold Kettle, "Our Mutual Friend," Gross and Pearson, p. 215, sees Boffin as the standard of "humane excellence" in the novel, cf. also Robert S. Baker, "Imagination and Literacy in Dickens's Our Mutual Friend," Criticism, 18 (1976), 61-63, and U. C. Knoepflmacher, p. 147, who notes that "only Boffin is secure enough in his identity to challenge Wegg to disapprove of the 'name of Boffin.'"

[60] Baker, p. 63.

[61] Baker, p. 63.

[62] Thurley, p. 328, says that "Noddy Boffin is the direct equivalent of the Cheerybles and Mr. Brownlow."

[63] Knoepflmacher, p. 143.

[64] Francis X. Shea, "No Change of Intention in Our Mutual Friend," Dickensian, 63 (1967), 37-40.

[65] Daleski, p. 328.

[66] Kettle, "Our Mutual Friend," p. 218. Kettle notes that in her education of Charley, "[Lizzie] has, in all innocence, made a frightful error in judgement."

[67] Ross Dabney, Love and Property in The Novels of Dickens (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), p. 173, noting Lizzie's rescue of Eugene, comments that she "is probably the only woman in England who could have done it. . . . Lizzie's origins, specifically the horrible trade she has helped her father to ply, enable her to save her lover." The point for Dabney, however, has to do with social origins (p. 174): "that what is a social shame may be a human strength."

[68] A number of articles examining reading, literacy and naming have appeared in connection with Our Mutual Friend. These include Kennedy, Stanley Friedman, "The Motif of Reading in Our Mutual Friend," NCF, 28 (1973-74), 38-61, and Baker. Friedman discusses the many allusions to reading in the novel and sees the attitude characters exhibit toward reading as a moral index. Kennedy (p. 167), is concerned

with the significance of naming, whether it is self-naming, "the only means by which a character can legitimately act against the amoral power of the transindividual mind and exert responsibility over his own life," or aggressive labelling of others (p. 172), a means of imposing one's own power. Baker's article is the most exhaustive treatment of the theme and sees *Our Mutual Friend* (p. 71), ultimately as "a secularized version of regeneration through the logos of language and imagination." The reading/language/naming theme, although none of the three critics mentioned above make this point, seems to me to be very clearly an aspect of the quest for order, a quest exemplified as well in Mr. Podsnap's reductionism: "Nothing to be but . . . etc."

[69] Hornback, p. 150, describes the Inn as "one small, precariously situated oasis of order in the centre of chaos."

[70] Fred Kaplan, *Dickens and Mesmerism: The Hidden Springs of Fiction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), has demonstrated in great detail how much Dickens's portraits of evil owe to contemporary notions about mesmerism and mesmeric fluids. Headstone, like Jasper, Fagin, and others can be seen as an example of an individual who manifest a mesmeric power over himself or others. Mesmerism may provide Dickens with a source for images with which to describe evil, but Kaplan himself (p. 186), adds, "This is the action of evil. But what is its source? It is not the mesmeric fluid. That force is natural and neutral. It may be used well, it may be used badly; it may serve others, it may serve the self's narrowest needs. The source of evil, then, is totally within human beings."

[71] Critical opinion on *Edwin Drood* has always been sharply divided. Forster, p. 409, records Longfellow's tribute, which described *Edwin Drood* as "one of Dickens's most beautiful works, if not the most beautiful of all," while Wilkie Collins, in some marginalia in his copy of Forster's biography, later printed in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 Jan. 1890, p. 3 (*The Critical Heritage*, p. 588) dismisses *Drood* as "Dickens's last laboured effort, the melancholy work of a worn-out brain." Contemporary reviewers appear to have agreed. An unsigned review in *The Saturday Review*, 17 Sept. 1870, p. 369, ridicules Jasper's passionate address to Rosa in Chapter XIX as "the sort of oration which a silly boy, nourished on bad novels, might prepare for such an occasion" (*The Critical Heritage*, p. 544), and Edith Simcox, who was to become one of George Eliot's most passionate admirers, writing under the name of "H. Laurenny," *The Academy*, 22 Oct. 1870, ii, pp. 1-3, calls it one of Dickens's "second-best works" (*The Critical Heritage*, p. 546). Shaw's famous characterization of *Edwin Drood* as the work of a man "already three-quarters dead" has been echoed in a variety of ways ever since. Monroe Engle, in *The Maturity of Charles Dickens* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), p. 184, thinks that "the rich undercurrent of suggestion, thematic and metaphorical, that sustain the greater novels of Dickens's maturity, is largely lacking here, where a tired, but highly conscious and wily novelist seems to have fallen back primarily on his undiminished ability to tell a gripping story." The novel has, of course, had its defenders. Edmund

Wilson, p. 90, praises the novel for its "intensity . . . nervous . . . concentration and economy," a judgement echoed by William Burgan, "The Refinement of Contrast: MS Revisions in Edwin Drood," DSA, 6 (1977), 167-82. Both Edgar Johnson and Sylvère Monod, Dickens the Novelist, find much to rejoice in. "Never," says Johnson, "has Dickens's control of scene and tone been more masterly" (p. 1115), while Monod describes the book as one "full of promise and achievement" (p. 490). A measure of Drood's reputation among more recent critics, however, might to adduced from the fact that several major studies in Dickens published during the last decade contain little or no mention of the work. See, for example, Sylvia Banks Manning, Dickens the Satirist (London and New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1971); Kincaid, The Rhetoric of Laughter,; Gold, Radical Moralist; Carey; and Lucas. Carey is the only one to mention Drood at all, and he contents himself with a note on Jasper's musicianship.

[72] See, for example, A. O. J. Cockshut, "Edwin Drood: Early and Late Dickens Reconciled," Gross and Pearson, p. 229.

[73] Thurley, p. 331.

[74] Miller, Charles Dickens, p. 83.

[75] Edmund Wilson would disagree. He argues that "the characters that are healthy, bright and good--Rosa Budd, and her baby name, for example--seem almost as two-dimensional as coloured paper dolls" (p. 91).

[76] Laurence Frank, "The Intelligibility of Madness in Our Mutual Friend and Edwin Drood," DSA, 5 (1976), 184, in an argument which owes a great deal to Edmund Wilson's suggestion that Jasper may be a symbolic figure representing Dickens's own conception of himself as an artist, thinks that Drood might have been resurrected after experiencing "a life-renewing baptismal ritual." Thurley too finds this a tempting possibility, speculating that Datchery may be Edwin, sunburnt after six months in Egypt, returning as "the risen Osiris" (p. 350), while Earle Davis, The Flint and the Flame: The Artistry of Charles Dickens (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1963), p. 194, recalling that Dickens had hoped in Drood to surpass Collins's Moonstone, thinks that he could only have done so had Drood "really escaped and disappeared" a notion seconded by Felix Aylmer, The Drood Case (London: R. Hart Davis, 1965), p. 162.

[77] Forster, pp. 408-09.

[78] Thurley, p. 343.

[79] The names of the two men also suggest the dark and light antithesis; Crisparkle, with its obvious echo of crystal, is set against Jasper, a semi-precious stone which is dark, opaque, non-crystalline, and, according to some descriptions, often stained a deep red.

[80] Thurley, p. 340.

[81] Frank, "Intelligibility of Madness," p. 172, notes Crisparkle's identification with a pastoral world, but being concerned to argue that Jasper is really the hero, is forced to interpret everything to do with Canon Crisparkle in a negative light: "While John Jasper grapples with his private demons, Septimus Crisparkle is free to feint and dodge before his own benevolent reflection, enjoying his skill and his mastery over a non-existent opponent." Monod, Dickens the Novelist, p. 490, by contrast, regards Crisparkle as "the most pleasant clergyman, and one of the pleasantest men ever created by Dickens."

[82] Canon Crisparkle's apparent inability to plumb the depths of Jasper's depravity might seem to contradict what I have said about his not being an innocent. Dickens's language as he describes it, however, might suggest that the clergyman's unsuspiciousness is as much a feint as his pretence of short-sightedness:

> "The dreadful suspicion of Jasper, which Rosa was so shocked to have received into her imagination, appeared to have no harbour in Mr. Crisparkle's" (ED, p. 262, my italics).

Since the novel was never completed, we cannot make the point with any certainty; however, in a novel filled with disguises and imposture (benevolent or otherwise) such a development would not be inconsistent.

[83] Frank, "Intelligibility of Madness," p. 181, is upset by this scene: "Surprisingly, Helena and Neville Landless humble themselves before Crisparkle. Suddenly, neither has the ability to penetrate Crisparkle's self-satisfied facade."

[84] Aeropagitica, p. 15.

[85] Loc. cit.

[86] Aeropagitica, p. 29.

[87] Charles Mitchell, "The Mystery of Edwin Drood: The Interior and Exterior of Self," ELH, 33 (1966), 230, argues that the novel deals essentially with the conflict between inner and outer selves. He regards the metaphor of the journey as symbolic of Jasper's quest "of an object in the outside world which will correspond, and hence give reality to, his vision."

[88] Thurley, p. 329.

[89] Thurley, p. 347.

[90] Thurley, p. 348, speaks of "the desperate comfortlessness of Dickens's world now."

[91] K. J. Fielding, Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction (1958; rpt. London: Longmans, 1965), p. 248, identifies the source of the quotation. Collins, Dickens and Crime, p. 297, notes that Dickens's number plans identify the phrase as the "keynote."

[92] Paul Gottschalk "Time in Edwin Drood," DSA, 1 (1970), 271,

accuses Dickens of having cited the passage incorrectly, because Ezek. 18:27 in the King James version of the Bible reads "When _a_ wicked man." Dickens, however, is correct by quoting the sentence as it appears in the Book of Common Prayer.

[93] Thurley, p. 337.

Footnotes--Conclusion

[1] Philip Collins, Dickens and Education (London: Macmillan, 1963).

[2] Greene, p. 57.

[3] Greene, p. 58.

[4] Charles Dickens, "Preface" to the 1841 edition of Oliver Twist, quoted by Kathleen Tillotson, "Oliver Twist," Essays and Studies, 12, n. p. 91. Mrs. Tillotson notes that the "1841 preface is given in full only in the National Edition (1906) and in Macmillan's edition of 1892."

[5] Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus and Heroes and Hero Worship, Everyman Edition (London: J. M. Dent, 1954), p. 143.

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NCF	Nineteenth-Century Fiction

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APPENDIX

THE VICTORIANS AND DEATH

The discarded rituals of an earlier age always have an air of quaintness about them to succeeding generations, but the full panoply of the Victorian funeral, with its mutes, gingerbread hearse, feather-trays and plumed black horses, is surely one of the odder social customs of the period. A couple of recent books, one on funeral customs in general,[1] the other dealing specifically with the Victorian era,[2] have brought together a wealth of material on the subject, including drawings, photographs, undertakers' bills, cemetery brochures and contemporary accounts of funerals, ranging from the fairly simple rites of the working class, to the grand extravaganza of the burial of the Duke of Wellington in 1852. This was a period, as John Morley points out,[3] in which vast new commercial cemeteries began to replace the simpler church-yard as burial sites. As one looks over the plans and sketches of the new Kensal Green and Highgate Cemeteries with their huge mausoleums, streets of catacombs, obelisks and broken columns, marble roses and weeping angels, one begins to realize that one is dealing with something very peculiar indeed. Barbara Jones describes the facilities offered by one commercial scheme, "The London Necropolis and National Mausoleum Company," a title which recalls Dickens's "United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company" (NN, p. 14), in its polysyllabic splendour. The company had a vast site thirty miles outside of London and a "private railway station adjoining Waterloo, with its own trains, two more stations in the cemetery, and the telegraphic address Tenebratio Longon."[4]

State funerals were occasions of the most lavish, not to say grotesque, displays. The funeral of the Duke of Wellington was preceded by a lying-in-state at Chelsea Hospital. The Hall, decorated according to designs approved by the Prince of Wales, is described by John Morley:

> The Vestibule to the Hall, approached by a covered way hung in black cloth, was itself hung in black cloth; from the center of the ceiling descended a chandelier that caught and held the fabric. The chandelier, worthy of some phantasmagoria of Edgar Allen Poe, took the shape of a gigantic plume of black feathers, like an enormous hanging spider. The light, supplied from a few candelabra, was purposely kept dim in order to prepare for the gorgeous blaze of light where the coffin stood.
>
> There, black cloth again draped the walls and ceiling, intercepted by niches in which pairs of soldiers . . . stood like statues; the black cloth was everywhere trellised with silver cords. Light blazed from eighty-three enormous candelabra. A dais, forty-five feet wide by thirty-five feet deep, held the coffin; then columns, representing bundles of spears tied with laurel, and studded with hatchments, carried the canopy . . . The dais was completely covered with cloth-of-gold . . . the canopy, of black velvet scattered with silver stars, bore on its front an heraldic mantle with the family arms emblazoned in gold; it was lined with silver tissue decorated with black spangles. . . . The whole effect was theatrical, eccentric, powerful and imperially pagan.[5]

The splendour of the lying-in-state was only outshone by the funeral car, a massive vehicle weighing eleven tons, bristling with spears and flags, and equipped with machinery so that the canopy could be lowered as the procession passed under Temple Bar (itself draped in black velvet and topped with papier-maché trophies). It was truly, as the gentleman from the Times said, with an understatement not evident in the proceedings, "the most interesting feature of the procession."[6]

This aspect of Victorian necrophilia was resisted by Dickens.

Not only did he leave clear instructions for his own funeral, directing that he be buried "in an inexpensive, unostentatious, and strictly private manner . . . that those who attend my funeral wear no scarf, cloak, black bow, long hat-band, or any other such revolting absurdity,"[7] he never lost an opportunity, in his novels, to satirize what he perceived as absurd and meaningless ceremonial. One of the most splendid funerals in Dickens's works is provided by Jonas Chuzzlewit for the father he thinks he has murdered. The undertaker's elaborate arrangements become the substitute for human feeling, a kind of wer-gilt paid by Jonas to stifle his guilt:

> At length the day of the funeral, pious and truthful ceremony that it was, arrived. . . . two mutes were at the house-door, looking as mournful as could reasonably be expected of men with such a thriving job in hand; the whole of Mr. Mould's establishment were on duty within the house or without; feathers waved, horses snorted, silk and velvets fluttered; in a word, as Mr. Mould emphatically said, "everything that money could do was done." (MC, p. 320)

In Great Expectations the funeral of Mrs. Joe becomes an occasion for a foolish display of third-rate pomp which leaves Pip feeling more irritated and amused than grieved:

> At last I came within sight of the house, and saw that Trabb and Co. had put in a funeral execution and taken possession. Two dismally absurd persons, each ostentatiously exhibiting a crutch done up in a black bandage . . . were posted at the front door. . . . as I came up, one of the two warders (the postboy) knocked at the door--implying that I was far too much exhausted by grief, to have strength remaining to knock for myself.
>
> . . . .
>
> Mr. Trabb . . . was holding a kind of black Bazaar, with the aid of a quantity of black pins. At the moment of my arrival, he had just finished putting somebody's hat into black long-clothes, like an African baby.
>
> . . . .
>
> "Pocket handkerchiefs out, all," cried Mr. Trabb at this point, in a depressed, business-like voice--"Pocket handkerchiefs out! We are ready!"
>
> So we all put our pocket handkerchiefs to our faces, as if our noses were bleeding, and filed out two and two. . . . The remains

> of my poor sister had been brought round by the kitchen door, and, it being a point of Undertaking ceremony that the six bearers must be stifled and blinded under a horrible black velvet housing with a white border, the whole looked like a blind monster with twelve human legs . . . .
>
> The neighbourhood, however, highly approved of these arrangements, and we were much admired as we went through the village; the more youthful and vigorous part of the community making dashes now and then to cut us off, and laying in wait to intercept us at points of vantage. At such times the more exuberant among them called out in an excited manner on our emergence round some corner of expectancy, "Here they come! Here they are!" and we were all but cheered. (GE, pp. 264-66)

What Dickens mocks in this passage is the use of the funeral to dazzle the neighbours with a display of one's status. (One imagines that Mrs. Joe, who never went out without carrying "a basket like the Great Seal of England in plaited straw, a pair of pattens, a spare shawl and an umbrella . . . such as Cleopatra or any other sovereign lady on the Rampage might exhibit her wealth in a pageant or procession" [GE, p. 93], would have been delighted.) The nineteenth century is a period when class lines have begun to shift and blur, and the customs and traditions of the upper classes to be imitated by the ranks below them. Morley quotes from an 1843 Supplementary Report . . . into the Practice of Interment in Towns (the question is addressed to an undertaker):

> "Are you aware that the array of funerals, commonly made by undertakers, is strictly the heraldic array of a baronial funeral, the two men who stand at the doors being supposed to be the two porters of the castle, with their staves, in black; the man who heads the procession, wearing a scarf, being a representative of a herald-at-arms; the man who carries a plume of feathers on his head being an esquire, who bears the shield and casque, with its plume of feathers; the pall-bearers, with batons, being representatives of knights-companions-at-arms; the men walking with wands being supposed to represent gentlemen-ushers with their wands:--are you aware that this is said to be the origin and type of the common array usually provided by those who undertake to perform funerals?"[8]

The custom spread to all classes; even the charity funeral of the woman in Oliver Twist involves the use of Oliver as a mute and the customary donning of black cloaks.

But an explanation of the Victorian funeral which attempts to account for it in terms of social snobbery does not go far enough. It was not only the funeral itself that was elaborate; everything having to do with death was surrounded with complex rituals. The various stages of mourning, and the appropriate attire for each, the length of time it was to be worn, and by whom, the social restrictions placed on the bereaved, the substitution of special mourning versions of things for their everyday counterparts--black-edged letter-paper, jet jewellery, a funeral tea-service (black, with forget-me-nots),[9] even in one case a black-beribboned ear trumpet[10]--all suggest that an enormous amount of time, energy, and expense were devoted to death-related customs and rituals.

Our own rituals of death, at least in North America, are in their own way just as elaborate as those performed by our Victorian ancestors, but they serve, I believe, a different function. As faith in an after-life disappears, society becomes less and less capable of coping with the fact of death, and more and more concerned to deny its reality. In modern Britain, according to Geoffrey Gorer,[11] this denial frequently takes the form of a pretence that nothing has happened. In our own culture, where the stiff upper lip is less admired, the physical reality of death is more likely to be denied by an unspoken agreement between undertaker and mourner to speak of, and to treat, the corpse as if it were still alive, and to avoid, wherever possible, all words and phrases with traditional connotations of death.[12] The Victorians, on the other hand, with their protracted and highly ritualized periods of mourning, and with their ostentatiously somber funeral "properties" (to use Dickens's word), appear to flaunt the fact of death as much as our own culture strives to deny it. The exaggerated quality of their responses, however, suggests fear and uncertainty rather than acceptance.

Ian Robinson, in The Survival of English, discusses the use of language to give a human dimension to biological events:

> . . . in birth, copulation and death there is nothing specifically human. Cows, too, are born, copulate and die, and elephants and mice. But animals do not marry, they mate; and when an animal is buried, there is only a funeral if it is organized by human beings.
>
> The move from birth, copulation and death to initiation, marriage and burial is from an animal to a specifically human world.[13]

Not only language, but rituals of all kinds serve this purpose; funerals are an attempt to make "something quite other and more serious than disposing of a corpse by putting it into the earth or burning it."[14] It is probably not coincidental that the same century which saw the emergence of wide-spread religious doubt--Queen Victoria herself is reported to have asked the Dean of Windsor "if there ever came over me (as over her) waves or flashes of doubtfulness whether, after all, it might be all untrue"[15]--witnessed also an ever-increasing elaboration in the rituals of death. It is possible to argue that as the Victorians became less and less able, in Tennyson's words, "to trust that those we call the dead / Are breathers of an ampler day,"[16] they tended to surround death with more and more pomp and ceremony, as if defying anyone to suggest that an event overlaid with so much magnificence and ritual, could possibly be meaningless. The Victorian cult of death, I would submit, is an elaborate exercise in the denial of doubt, and the stronger the doubt, the more intricate the mechanisms of denial.[17]

Footnotes--Appendix

[1] Barbara Jones, Design for Death (London: Andre Deutsch, 1967).

[2] John Morley, Death, Heaven and the Victorians (London: Studio Vista, 1971).

[3] Morley, p. 41.

[4] Jones, p. 181.

[5] Morley, pp. 82-83.

[6] Morley, p. 84.

[7] Forster, p. 301.

[8] Morley, p. 19.

[9] Morley, illus. plate 14.

[10] Morley, illus. plate 33.

[11] Geoffrey Gorer, Death, Grief, and Mourning in Contemporary Britain (London: Cresset Press, 1965). Gorer (p. 113) on the basis of an elaborate sociological study, comes to the conclusion "that the most typical reaction of the majority in Britain today . . . is the denial of mourning, in the period after the funeral. Certainly, social recognition of mourning has practically disappeared; we no longer recognize a mourner when we see one--a black tie may be worn for its elegance, without any symbolic intent--and are at a loss and embarrassed when we do consciously meet one. Giving way to grief is stigmatized as morbid, unhealthy, demoralizing--very much the same terms are used to reprobate mourning as were used to reprobate sex; and the proper action of a friend and well-wisher is felt to be distraction of a mourner from his or her grief. . . . Mourning is treated as if it were a weakness, a self indulgence, a reprehensible bad habit instead of a psychological necessity."

[12] For a full discussion of contemporary North American funeral customs, see Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death (London: Hutchinson, 1963). Evelyn Waugh's The Loved One (London: Chapman and Hall, 1948) satirizes the same subject.

[13] Ian Robinson, The Survival of English (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1973), p. 47.

[14] Loc. cit.

[15] Elizabeth Longford, Victoria R.I. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), p. 341.

[16] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, In Memoriam, cxviii.

[17] The passing of the Victorian funeral and its related traditions of mourning can be dated, according to Gorer (p. 6), "towards the end of the war, in 1917 and 1918. . . . The holocaust of young men had created such an army of widows; it was no longer socially realistic for them all to act as though their emotional and sexual life were over for good, which was the underlying message of the ritual mourning. And with the underlying message, the ritual went into the discard. There was too, almost certainly, a question of public morale; one should not show the face of grief to the boys home on leave from the trenches."